TOWARD A *MUSLIMA* THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: THE QURʾĀN, FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Theological and Religious Studies

By

Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, M.A.

Washington, DC
April 19, 2011

UMI Number: 3450841

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI 3450841
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC.
All rights reserved. This edition of the work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright 2011 by Jerusha Tanner Lamptey
All Rights Reserved

TOWARD A *MUSLIMA* THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM:
THE QURʾĀN, FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., Ph.D.

Abstract

This study examines the Qurʾānic depiction of the religious 'other,' and has three main objectives. The first objective is to survey and critique the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity, thus highlighting two crucial shortcomings. The first is the underlying conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. The second and directly related shortcoming is the failure to integrate—rather than prioritize—a number of diverse considerations including sameness, difference, interaction, dynamic relationality, and the teleological value of difference. The second objective of this study is to indicate possible ways to overcome the noted shortcomings in contemporary Islamic discourse. I construct one such alternative conceptual and methodological approach, a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. *Muslima* theology emerges in response to the perceived shortcomings and draws insights from contemporary Muslim women's interpretation of the Qurʾān; feminist approaches to religious pluralism; and Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis of the Qurʾān. The third objective of this study is to employ this alternative conception and method to reinterpret the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. Through a close and detailed reading of the Qurʾānic text, I distinguish between hierarchical and lateral religious difference, explore the complex relationality that exists among Qurʾānic concepts related to hierarchical religious difference, and articulate an integrated model of religious difference based upon the aforementioned distinction and exploration.

Acknowledgements

There have been many people who have guided and supported me in this journey. To begin, I am extremely grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., Dr. Yvonne Y. Haddad, and Dr. Jeannine Hill Fletcher. You have each contributed a unique and invaluable perspective to this project. I am appreciative of your time, your insights and your expertise. I am especially grateful to Dr. Daniel A. Madigan, who in addition to serving as my dissertation advisor, also willingly provided me with guidance in numerous other endeavors. I must also sincerely thank Dr. Peter C. Phan, who, since our first phone conversation regarding my admission to Georgetown program, has never ceased to be an enthusiastic supporter. I am also greatly appreciative of the entire Department of Theology, especially those professors from whom I have learned and with whom I have worked while at Georgetown. In particular, my gratitude is extended to Fr. John W O'Malley, S.J. and Fr. Stephen Fields, S.J., who assisted me in developing my work for publication; and Dr. Theresa M. Sanders, Dr. Joseph M. Murphy, and Dr. Tod Linafelt, who provided invaluable teaching-related guidance.

I am thankful as well for the encouragement and opportunities provided by Dr. Louis Cantori, Dr. Mona Abul Fadl, Dr. Chester L. Gillis, Dr. John Borelli, Dr. Mohammad Hassan Khalil, Dr. Sherman Jackson, and Dr. Amir Hussain. As for my fellow students in the Georgetown graduate program, particularly the members of my cohort, Dr. Erika Seamon, Dr. Anh Tran, and Maureen Walsh, one could not hope for more inspiring and supportive colleagues.

Additionally, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to those scholars that I have engaged in this project, particularly Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Riffat Hassan, Farid Esack, Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī, and Toshihiko Izutsu. I also wish to acknowledge Dr. Michael Mason who

sparked my initial interest in studying religion, and Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani who taught me about Qurʾānic unity and perpetually encouraged me to explore and question the Qurʾānic text.

My sincere appreciation is also extended to my family and friends. Your support and confidence have been invaluable. In particular, I am grateful to my mother, Mary Rhodes, who has helped me in innumerable ways throughout these past five years. Also, I am grateful to my daughter, my heart Jalilah Odaaley. You have provided me with balance, challenge, and inspiration. In all, my ultimate gratitude rests with God. All praise is due to God.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:
Introduction 1

Chapter Two:
'Self' and 'Other' in Historical Islamic Discourse 16

Chapter Three:
Sameness and Difference in Contemporary Islamic Approaches to Religious Diversity 63

Chapter Four:
Contemporary Muslim Women Interpreters of the Qurʾān:
Hermeneutical Approach and Conception of Difference 100

Chapter Five:
From Sexual Difference to Religious Difference:
Conceptual Extensions from Feminist Theological Approaches to Religious Difference 135

Chapter Six:
From Holistic Interpretation to Relational Interpretation:
Hermeneutical Insights from Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantic Analysis of the Qur'ān 175

Chapter Seven:
Lateral and Hierarchical Religious Difference in the Qurʾān 198

Chapter Eight:
Relational Mapping of the Semantic Field of Taqwā:
Concepts of Hierarchical Religious Difference 250

Chapter Nine:
A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism:
Sameness, Difference and Relationality 319

Bibliography 340

Chapter One

Introduction

1. General Introduction

How does the Qurʾān depict the religious 'other'? This question lies at the heart of this study, and it is a question with important theological and practical implications. Theologically, it is intimately connected to the understanding of God and God's action in the world. It is also intertwined with the understanding of humankind and the purpose of human creation. In fact, this question in many ways defines the theological nexus between God and humankind; the Qurʾān's depiction of the religious 'other' is also a depiction of God and the religious 'self.'

Practically, the depiction of the religious 'other' assumes great importance in light of the uniqueness and pervasiveness of the modern experience of religious plurality. In today's increasingly global world, we encounter diversity—of all sorts—in a more intimate and intricate manner than in centuries past. Such encounters frequently prompt inquiry into convergences and divergences in belief and practice and discussions of appropriate forms of interreligious interaction. Moreover, ongoing waves of religious violence and oppression force us to ask difficult questions about the relationship between depictions of religious 'others,' intolerance, and oppression. While there is not always a necessary connection between negative depictions of the religious 'other' and intolerant actions, at the very least negative depictions can be used as fuel for already kindled fires.

Some contemporary Islamic scholars have attempted to grapple with the Qurʾān's depiction of the religious 'other,' raising provocative and pointed questions about the

existence, value, and function of religious diversity. What does the Qurʾān say about Judaism, Christianity, and other religions?[1] Is Islam the only 'valid' religion in the present time?[2] Are all religions particular expressions of an ineffable Divine unity?[3] Is Islam the only acceptable and salvifically effective path, or are there multiple paths?[4] While seemingly varied, these questions all revolve around one central concern: the identification and evaluation of difference. Perhaps more significantly, scholarly responses to these questions demonstrate a shared conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. This particular conception of difference, I contend, has led to a theoretical and theological gridlock. In conceiving of difference in this manner, contemporary scholars are unable to account for both religious sameness and difference without resorting to models of isolation or hierarchy.

In the present study, I aim to illuminate the limitations of the shared conception of difference that dominates contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity; to construct an alternative conceptual and methodological approach; and then to employ that alternative conception and method to reinterpret the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

2. Brief Introduction to Theology of Religions

This study aims to contribute an Islamic perspective to the field of theology of religions. Therefore, before detailing the specific nature of my research, it is necessary to

[1] For example, see Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007).
[2] For example, see Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (London: Al Hoda Publishing, 1999).
[3] For example, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Religion and Religions," in *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, ed. Muhammad Suheyl Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008), 59-81; Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'an and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006).
[4] For example, see Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 211-219.

provide a brief introduction to this field and to highlight some convergences and divergences between the larger field and the existing Islamic discourse.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen defines theology of religions as a "discipline of theological studies which attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions."[5] As a theological enterprise, it attempts to work within and through the parameters of one religion—using the distinctive theological methods and sources of that tradition—to theorize about the meaning of religious diversity in general and to assess the value of specific religions and their role, if any, in relation to the tradition. Theology of religions does draw upon other resources and methods as well, but it is primarily concerned with accounting for the religious 'other' from the theological standpoint.

The field of theology of religions has largely been developed by Christian theologians. As a result, many of the central questions and theoretical underpinnings have a distinctive Christian character. This is evident from the fact that the foremost question of the field has been salvation and the accessibility of salvation to individuals who align themselves with religions other than Christianity. In some circumstances, this question has arisen from the attempt to negotiate two affirmations: first, that God desires the universal salvation of all people and, second, that Jesus Christ is the unique locus of salvation.[6] Various Christian perspectives in theology of religions "reflect a sorting out and struggling with these two foundational affirmations."[7] Thus, some perspectives emphasize only one affirmation, while others diversely attempt to balance or maintain both affirmations simultaneously. Although the central question in theology of religions has been salvation, Christian theology of religions

[5] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 20.
[6] Kärkkäinen, *Introduction*, 26-27.
[7] Kärkkäinen, *Introduction*, 26.

has also explored issues such as the presence of revelation in other religions[8] and the moral and ethical value of other religions.[9]

Contemporary Islamic scholars have begun increasingly to contribute to the field of theology of religions.[10] This has resulted in Islamic articulations of the soteriological status of religious 'others,'[11] examinations of Islamic perspectives towards specific religious groups,[12] and attempts to formulate overarching accounts of the origin, value, and purpose of religious diversity.[13] Nevertheless, Islamic theology of religions remains an emergent field due to the fact that not all of these articulations explicitly or consciously attempt to grapple with the theoretical underpinnings of the larger field of theology of religions. The discussion of religious diversity from an Islamic perspective is not new. However, the deliberate attempt to engage the central questions and theories of theology of religions is.

Such engagement involves, for instance, an evaluation of the relevance of the central question of salvation.[14] As noted, this question frequently arises from the tensive convergence between two distinctive Christian affirmations. While it is tempting simply to substitute the defining feature of the Islamic tradition—that is, the Qurʾānic revelation—in the place of Jesus in these affirmations, to do so would be to assume structural and theological parity. A general concept of salvation certainly plays a role in the Islamic tradition, but it arises out of distinct

[8] For example, Emile Brunner, "Revelation and Religion," in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 113-132. See also Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 33-36.
[9] For example, Chester Gillis, *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology* (Louvain: Peeters, Eerdmans, 1998), 133-164. See also Knitter, *Introducing Theologies*, 134-148.
[10] I will discuss the contributions of contemporary Islamic scholars in detail in Chapter Three.
[11] For example, Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others'" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007).
[12] For example, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity*.
[13] For example, Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*; Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*.
[14] Legenhausen is the scholar who most explicitly discusses the relevance of salvation. (See Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*.)

conceptions of human anthropology, divine ontology, and the relationship between God and humankind. Therefore, a few contemporary Islamic scholars have endeavored to shift the central focus from the question of salvation. Muhammad Legenhausen, for example, has emphasized the deontological question of correct religion, that is, the question of what God commands in terms of practice.[15]

Another topic is the suitability of the standard tripartite typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism to the Islamic discourse. Legenhausen and Reza Shah-Kazemi[16] have both offered critiques of this typology. While they have attempted to affirm the value of other religions to some degree, they have done so through the introduction of the alternative models of non-reductive pluralism and universalism. Legenhausen's non-reductive pluralism is a critical response to the pluralism of John Hick,[17] a pluralism which Legenhausen deems unsuitable for religious traditions that emphasize law and social praxis. Shah-Kazemi's universalism aims to affirm religious pluralism as the intentional creation of God.

Islamic engagements with the field of theology of religions also raise other questions, such as those related to supersession; to the status and content of other revelations; to issues of ethics and justice; and to the depiction of religious diversity within various Islamic sources.

It is to this emergent Islamic discourse that the current study aims to contribute. More specifically, I aim to build upon existing contemporary Islamic contributions, while simultaneously engaging the field of theology of religions and the longstanding historical Islamic discourse on religious diversity.

---

[15] Muhammad Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Surrey: Ashgate, 2005), 51-73, here 65.
[16] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* xxiv-xxvi.
[17] See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2004).

3. Objectives and Method of Approach

OBJECTIVES

The first objective of this study is to survey and critique the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity, thus highlighting two crucial shortcomings. The first is the underlying conception of difference as that which discretely and statically divides. This conception results in the need either to neglect difference, to isolate it, or to rank it hierarchically. The first two—neglect and isolation—are not viable options in the contemporary era. The third—hierarchical assessment—poses practical problems as well. Moreover, it is conceptually insufficient in light of an understanding of the religious 'other' as the proximate other that blurs boundaries and compels continual, complex and integrated consideration. The second and directly related shortcoming is the failure to integrate—rather than prioritize—a number of diverse considerations including sameness, difference, interaction, dynamic relationality, and the teleology of difference.

In surveying existing contemporary Islamic writings, I focus on scholarly contributions written in English that feature prominently in the discourse within the United States. The scholars I examine are Asghar Ali Engineer, a public intellectual and activist in India; Abdulaziz Sachedina, of Indian descent and born in Tanzania, but teaching in the United States; Mahmut Aydin, a Turkish theologian working in Turkey; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian philosopher in the United States; Reza Shah-Kazemi, who is affiliated with the Institute of Ismaili Studies and working in the United Kingdom; Muhammad Legenhausen, an American philosopher working in Iran; Farid Esack, a South African scholar and activist; and Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī who was born in Palestine, yet studied and taught in the United States. As is evident from this list, not all of these scholars are physically located within the United States. Nevertheless, their writings on

religious diversity have shaped the discourse within the United States. As a result, they form the backdrop to my current endeavor to articulate an Islamic theology of religions that is relevant and responsive to the contemporary American context.

However, it is important to note that the diverse backgrounds and contexts of these scholars have necessarily shaped their work. Some of these scholars, such as Engineer in India and Esack in South Africa, have been compelled to write on religious diversity due to their firsthand experience of religious intolerance. Others, such as Sachedina, Nasr and al-Fārūqī, have written in the context of religious pluralism and academic discussions thereof within the United States. Additionally, these scholars represent various philosophical and theological perspectives, including Shīʿism (Engineer, Sachedina, Shah-Kazemi, Nasr, and Legenhausen), Sunnism (Aydin, Esack and al-Fārūqī), and Sufism/Perennial Philosophy (Nasr and Shah-Kazemi). This diversity is of great value in the current study because it demonstrates a variety of possible approaches to the topic of religious difference. However, this diversity is not due to intentional selection on my part; rather, it is one of the distinguishing marks of the discourse within the United States. While not the focus of this study, it is worth noting that the comparative examination of writings on Islamic theology of religions from various contexts and in various languages would also be intriguing and would reveal continuities and discontinuities in contextual concerns and methodological approaches.

The second objective of this study is to indicate possible ways to overcome the noted shortcomings in contemporary Islamic discourse. This involves the search for alternative conceptions of difference and new methodologies appropriate to those conceptions. I construct one such alternative conceptual and methodological approach, a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. *Muslima* theology emerges in response to the perceived shortcomings and

draws insights from contemporary Muslim women's interpretation of the Qurʾān; feminist approaches to religious pluralism; and Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis of the Qurʾān.

I have invoked this novel designation, a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism, in order to signify three central aspects of my approach.[18] First, similar to Muslim women interpreters, my approach arises out of my positioning as a believing and practicing Muslim. Second, my approach arises out of my positioning as a woman. Part of this relates to my individual experiences as a woman. However, another aspect of it arises from a deliberate choice to align myself with scholarly reflections on women's experience. It is, therefore, not only an experiential positioning, but also a theoretical positioning. Third, my approach is theological in that it endeavors to engage in interpretation, but also to consciously and explicitly go beyond exegetical work to formulate a theological conception based upon that exegesis. I do not apply this designation—that is, *Muslima* theology—to the work of other scholars, but I leave open the possibility that it may be applicable to other similar efforts.

The third objective of this study is to employ this alternative conception and method in reinterpreting the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. Through a close and detailed reading of the Qurʾānic text, I distinguish between religious differences that are hierarchical and those I call 'lateral,' since they represent diversity without any evaluative significance. It further involves exploring the complex relations that exist among Qurʾānic concepts linked to hierarchical religious difference, and articulating an integrated model of religious difference based upon this distinction and these relations.

[18] The term *Muslima* in Arabic means a female Muslim, or a female who submits to and is devoted to God.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

This study derives its theoretical orientation from two areas. The first is work of Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān, in particular Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan. In addressing central issues related to women, biological sex, and gender, these scholars share much in common with other Muslim women scholars. However, I have specifically selected Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan due to their explicit emphasis on hermeneutical approach; their attempts to articulate an underlying framework within which sexual/biological difference is to be understood; and their situatedness in the context of the United States. As a whole, however, contemporary Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān do not by any means form a monolithic or homogeneous group.

Muslim women interpreters are an essential theoretical resource for this study for two central reasons. First, women—whether silent, silenced or just unheard—have generally suffered from interpretative 'voicelessness' within Islamic history; the Islamic interpretative tradition has historically been dominated and controlled by men. Thus, the mere inclusion of a largely excluded voice has the potential to offer new insights. Second, the central interpretative task of these scholars is the elucidation of a Qurʾānic conception of human difference, specifically sexual/biological difference. In summary, the conception of difference presented by Muslim women interpreters dismisses a focus on difference in isolation; it begins with sameness; it acknowledges divinely-intended difference; it conceives of the relationship between sameness and difference as a purposeful and functional; and it concludes with the assertion that evaluative differentiation is possible only on the basis of individual *taqwā* (piety) as manifest in a multifaceted series of relationships. In this study, elements of this specific

conception of difference are generalized and utilized as a guide in articulating a novel conception of another form of difference, that is, religious difference.

The other source of theoretical orientation is feminist theology from other religious traditions, and feminist theological contributions to the discourse on religious pluralism. In the last three decades a small number of feminist theologians have made important contributions to the field of theology of religions. These feminist theologians have not simply taken up religious difference as a novel and distinct subject matter; rather, they have approached theology of religions as another example of a discourse in which the universalization of a particular norm has resulted in the oppression and marginalization of individuals and groups that do not conform to that norm. The unique—albeit in many cases emergent—perspectives manifest in their contributions are the direct result of a conscious endeavor to apply the foundational theories and insights of their feminist reflections on sexual difference, gender, and androcentrism to the topic of religious difference. It is this conscious endeavor to extend conceptual insights to religious difference that makes their contributions of great value to the current study. Of particular relevance are their critiques of the standard typologies of theology of religions,[19] their desire to affirm particularity without necessarily resorting to hierarchical evaluation,[20] and their incorporation of identity theory into the discussion of religious diversity.[21]

[19] For example, see Ursula King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions," in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, ed. John D'Arcy May (Herndon, VA: Cassell/Wellington House, 1998), 40-58; Kwok Pui-lan, "Beyond Pluralism," in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 186-208.
[20] For example, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).
[21] For example, see Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly On Salvation?: A Feminist Approach To Religious Pluralism* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005).

METHODOLOGY: QUR'ĀN AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

The methodological approach assumed in the constructive portion of this study is a combination of the hermeneutical stance of contemporary Muslim women interpreters and the semantic methodology of Toshihiko Izutsu. While Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan all acknowledge other interpretative sources, including the *sunna* (practice of Muḥammad), *aḥādīth* (narrations of the practices of Muḥammad), *'ijmā'* (consensus of scholars), and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), they hold the Qur'ān to be the main standard for theological reinterpretation. It is important to clarify this position. None of these scholars unequivocally dismisses secondary sources; they do not advocate a Qur'ān-only approach. Rather, they argue that secondary sources must be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion that gives precedence to the Qur'ānic message and the Qur'ānic ethos, a hermeneutic that prioritizes the Qur'ān and uses it to assess the other sources.

In challenging the dominance of monovalent, atomistic, and largely androcentric interpretations of the text, they employ a hermeneutic that emphasizes textual holism, textual unity, and an overarching Qur'ānic *Weltanschauung*. Through close intratextual reading; through the cross-referencing of syntax, terminology, structure, descriptions, and topics; and through the elucidation of larger Qur'ānic themes, the Qur'ān becomes the principal source of its own explication. These scholars ardently insist on the distinction between the Qur'ān and interpretations thereof, as well as the social/moral impact of hermeneutical choice. As believers they accept the Qur'ānic text, but they draw attention to the fact that every encounter with that text is an act of interpretation. It is not possible simply to read the text and uncover its singular meaning. The Qur'ānic text is polysemic, open to multiple readings or

interpretations, and the act of interpretation is necessarily influenced by the context of the interpreter.

Like contemporary Muslim women interpreters, Izutsu premises his approach upon the notion of an overriding and unified Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*.[22] In order to elucidate this worldview, he distinguishes between the basic and relational meaning of words. Basic meaning being defined as the meaning or conceptual content an individual word has and retains outside of the Qurʾānic context. Izutsu argues that, while the basic meaning perpetually inheres in the word, it does not exhaust the meaning of the term. In the context of the Qurʾān, every word also has a relational meaning, a connotative meaning defined by its complex and particular relation to other Qurʾānic words and concepts. Izutsu emphasizes the primacy of this relational meaning over basic meaning. He then endeavors to elucidate the Qurʾānic worldview through the mapping of semantic fields centered on focus-words and key-terms. This approach enables him to articulate a complex 'web' of interlocking and dynamic—sometimes tensive—semantic fields.

In this study, I appropriate the hermeneutical approach of Muslim women interpreters and the semantic methodology of Izutsu to map the complex relationality that exists among the central Qurʾānic concepts of religious difference, including *īmān*, *islām*, *ḥanīf*, *kufr*, *shirk*, and *nifāq*. It is important to note that Izutsu himself examines some of these concepts. While I will draw upon aspects of his analysis in this study, I will diverge from him in his eventual reduction of the concepts, his subsumption of concepts under just two headings, and his resultant emphasis on binary conceptual opposition.

[22] Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Tokyo, Japan: Keio University, 1965); Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University, 2002); Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo, Japan: Keio University, 1964).

It is also important to acknowledge that—as may already be evident—this study will focus on the Qurʾān. This is not intended to dismiss the relevance of other Islamic sources, but rather it is an intentional hermeneutical choice designed to facilitate the articulation of relational complexities within the Qurʾān. Frequently, a single Qurʾānic concept is analyzed by tracing its meaning in the Qurʾān, in the *aḥadīth*, in exegesis, and in other sources. This is a viable and valuable method. However, this study aims to focus on Qurʾānic unity and the relationships among the multiple concepts within that unity. This initial step provides a foundation upon which to carry out further examinations of the depiction of religious difference in other sources. This is not part of the current study, but would inevitably be the next step in analysis. That being said, though, in keeping with the hermeneutic of suspicion promoted by Muslim women interpreters, in such studies the Qurʾān would remain the standard by which other sources were assessed.

Overview of Chapters

In Part One of this study, I explore historical and contemporary Islamic discourse on religious difference. Chapter Two examines various genres of this historical discourse—including the apologetic, polemical, exegetical, juridical, and mystical—in an effort to highlight the complex and diverse processes of self-identification, boundary creation, and 'othering' that are woven throughout Islamic history. This chapter also provides a foundation upon which to better understand the contemporary Islamic discourse which, in addition to being an engagement with the modern field of theology of religions, it is also a continuation—and in some ways an amalgamation—of various historical preoccupations. Chapter Three critically explores contemporary Islamic approaches in English to theology of religions, approaches

which feature prominently in scholarly discourse in the United States. In doing so, I identify two dominant trends: the prioritization of sameness and the attempt to affirm simultaneously both sameness and difference. Furthermore, I identify a shared, underlying conception of difference as that which discretely and statically divides. I also highlight the implications of this conception of difference for understanding the proximate religious other, the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other.

In Part Two of this study, I construct the conceptual and hermeneutical infrastructure of a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism by drawing foundational insights from three sources: contemporary Muslim women's interpretation of the Qurʾān, feminist approaches to religious pluralism, and Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis of the Qurʾān. In Chapter Four, I offer a general survey of debates on Islam and feminism, and then examine the conceptual and hermeneutical contributions of Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān, focusing primarily on three scholars: Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan. I argue that there are elements—including the distinction between lateral and hierarchical difference—from these scholars' conception of sexual difference that can be generalized and connected to a novel, complex and integrated conception of religious difference. In Chapter Five, I provide an overview of feminist contributions to theology of religions with the goal of identifying various elements that are consistent with and thus capable of guiding the extension of the conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. I probe the manner in which various feminist theologians have attempted to extend their methods, sources and norms to the topic of religious diversity, and ultimately I argue that a *Muslima* theology will similarly aim to account for and value difference with relationality and without hierarchical evaluation. In Chapter Six, I outline the hermeneutical approach of Toshihiko Izutsu, focusing

primarily on his intra-Qurʾānic and synchronic semantic methodology. I argue that Izutsu's method of semantic analysis provides the ideal extension to the hermeneutical approach drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. With its emphasis on relational meaning, overlapping semantic fields, and multifaceted interconnections, it is ideally suited to explicating the complex relationality that exists in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

In Part Three of the study, I utilize the infrastructure developed in Part Two to re-evaluate, re-interpret, and re-envision the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference, thereby articulating a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. In Chapter Seven, I distinguish between hierarchical and lateral religious difference in the Qurʾān—between the semantic fields of *taqwā* and *umma*—and argue against the static and holistic alignment of the two genres of difference, which results in automatic ascription of a particular evaluation to a particular religious community. In Chapter Eight, I examine the genre of hierarchical religious difference, that is, the semantic field of *taqwā*, in greater detail. I explore the hierarchical, value-laden concepts of *īmān*, *islām*, *ḥanīf*, *kufr*, *shirk*, and *nifāq* in reference to *taqwā* in order to illuminate similarities, differences, overlaps, and gradations in the Qurʾānic discourse. Based on this exploration, I contend that the Qurʾānic discourse on hierarchical religious difference is characterized by dynamism, ambiguous boundaries, and relational complexity. In Chapter Nine, I articulate an integrated model of Qurʾānic religious difference, a model that aims to re-weave creation, revelation, lateral difference, and hierarchal difference into a coherent—although complex and at times ambiguous—narrative. I also argue for the necessity of re-envisioning the Qurʾānic discourse as provocative guidance rather than as taxonomy of difference.

Chapter Two

'Self' and 'Other' in Historical Islamic Discourse

1. Introduction

In *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*,[1] Daniel Boyarin argues that the historical division between Judaism and Christianity was not the result of a "natural parting of ways,"[2] but rather was the result of an intentional project—heresiology—that focused on "anatomizing, pinning down, making taxonomies of Christians" who were not 'in.'[3] The discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, moreover, was not simply a descriptive enterprise that highlighted extant distinctions. On the contrary, it was a deliberately proscriptive enterprise designed to "eradicate the fuzziness of the borders, semantic and social,"[4] and thereby clearly establish boundaries and threshold criteria by which membership in one *or* another community could be determined and enforced.

Drawing upon the theory of interpellation, Boyarin also contends that heresiology was not only concerned with voicing a negative assessment of the 'other,' but also—and perhaps more significantly—it was concerned with creating the 'other' as a subject.[5] By erecting borders—between heretical and orthodox Christians, and ultimately between Judaism and Christianity as religions[6]—the other was 'called' into existence and became the necessary

[1] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).
[2] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 1.
[3] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xi.
[4] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xi.
[5] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 9-11.
[6] In fact, Boyarin holds that the concept of 'religion' in and of itself is a reproduction of this particular Christian worldview. (Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 8) Religion as a concept comes to denote a distinct entity with clear boundaries

counterpoint for a community's delineation of its own identity. Borders, then, according to Boyarin, are as much about identifying the 'other' as they are about identifying or proclaiming the uniqueness of the 'self.'

While the historical relationship between Islam and other religions does not exactly parallel the historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, a similar process of 'othering' is depicted within Islamic history by Fred Donner. Donner argues that the early community of Muḥammad was an ecumenical "community of believers (*muʾminūn*)" joined together on the basis of shared beliefs in God and the Last Day, rather than on the basis of confessional identity.[7] The "distinct religious confession" known today as Islam only emerged later, according to Donner, and was "partially the result of intentional efforts made by the ruling Umayyad dynasty and its supporters and partially the result of a sea change in the perceptions of identity within the community generally on matters of identity."[8]

Donner's focus on the intentional and progressive nature of identity construction confirms the relevance of Boyarin's work to the Islamic context. Boyarin's central contention about identity and the deliberate construction/enforcement of borders is able to provide an essential analytical infrastructure for examining historical Islamic discussions of intra- and inter- religious difference. In particular, Boyarin's themes of utilizing the 'other' as a counterpoint for articulating self-identity; creating taxonomies of internal difference; and

---

that is 'disembedded' from other aspects of experience. (11) He cites W. C. Smith (*The Meaning and End of Religion* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991]) and Talal Asad (*Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993]) as confirming this theory.

[7] Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *al-Abhāth* 50-51 (2002-2003): 9-53, here 10-11. See also Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010).

[8] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 224, 195. Specifically, Donner identifies Umayyad restoration and conquests (195-203); redefinition of the terms *muʾmin* (believer) and *muslim* (submitter) to limit them to those who followed Qurʾānic law (203-204); emphasis on Muhammad and the Qurʾān (205-211); responses to Trinitarian beliefs (212-214); coalescence of Islamic ritual practices (214-216); elaboration of the account of Islamic origins (216-217); and emergence of Arab political identity (217-220).

defining and defending discrete boundaries are all present in historical Islamic writings on religious difference. As such, in the present chapter, I will explore various genres of this historical discourse—including the apologetic, polemical, exegetical, juridical, and mystical—in an effort to highlight the complex and diverse processes of self-identification, boundary creation, and 'othering' that are woven throughout Islamic history.

In doing so, I also intend to root the subsequent analysis of the contemporary discourse firmly within the historical tradition. As much as contemporary Islamic discourse is an engagement with the modern field of theology of religions, it is also a continuation—and in some ways an amalgamation—of various historical preoccupations. Many of these preoccupations—such as the status of previous divine revelations and the definition of faith, *īmān*—retain central significance in contemporary discussions. Since my objective is to identify trends and central issues, however, I have not constructed this chapter as a chronological survey or exhaustive analysis of individual thinkers. Instead, I have selected figures based upon three criteria: first, that they are centrally representative of the various genres, for example Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq and al-Bāqillānī; second, that they are frequently cited by contemporary scholars in their construction of Islamic approaches to religious diversity, for example Ibn al-ʿArabī; or, third, that they are common points of reference in more general 'Western' discussions of Islamic thought, for example Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr.[9]

2. Rejecting the 'Other' and Projecting the 'Self': Polemical and Apologetic Trends

One of the most evident genres of historical Islamic discourse on religious difference is the polemical refutation of Christianity and Judaism. While it is tempting to lump these

[9] It should be noted that not every scholar meets all three of these criteria.

writings into a monolithic body of work concerned primarily with undercutting the legitimacy of Judaism and Christianity, there are important nuances that must be illuminated.

An early example of this genre is the 3rd h/9th century *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā* (*Refutation of Three Christian Sects*) written by Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. 247/861).[10] Abū ʿĪsā lived and wrote in the context of the "religiously pluralistic culture" of Baghdad under Abbasid rule.[11] While this was a context of religious diversity and religious interaction, it was simultaneously a context of legal separation between religions in general, and uneasiness with and mere toleration of Christianity in particular. Abū ʿĪsā is associated early on with Muʿtazilite thought but later was accused of various unorthodox views, including Manichean and Shīʿa sympathies. Despite these accusations of heresy, his writing on religions and sects has served as an invaluable source for many prominent, later scholars, some of whom draw upon him explicitly and others who do so anonymously (for example, al-Bāqillānī and al-Jabbār).[12]

In the *Radd*, Abū ʿĪsā details the beliefs and doctrines of three Christian sects: the Nestorians, Monophysites/Jacobites, and Chalcedonians/Melkites. He then proceeds to refute each sect's position on the specific doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. There are three characteristics of his treatise that are of particular interest. The first is amount of effort that Abū ʿĪsā devotes to detailing the intricacies of various Christian sects. While many other

[10] Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Warrāq, *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā*, ed. and trans. David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū ʿĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Trinity"*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 45 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992); *Idem*, *Early Muslim Polemic Against Christianity: Abū ʿĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Incarnation"*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002). See Chapter Three, "Early Islamic Refutations of Christianity" in *Anti-Christian* for a detailed survey of various other early polemical writings, including those authored by ʿAlī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiz, Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasanī, and Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʾī, and their intersections with the arguments and approach of Abū ʿĪsā.

[11] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 4-9.

[12] Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 12, 42-43. See also S.M. Stern, "Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāḳ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2005), vol. 1, 130.

polemicists attacked Christianity on similar subjects and even with similar argumentation, the degree and nuance of his description is distinctive.[13] In addition to the level of detail, David Thomas maintains that Abū ʿĪsā seems to have had a somewhat objective approach towards and interest in other religions.[14] This interest in describing other religions, however, is not a necessary component in the polemical and heresiological enterprise that Boyarin describes as being aimed at asserting self-identity in contrast to the 'other.' In fact, excessive description can be counterproductive to the goal of erecting clear, simple borders between groups. While Abū ʿĪsā does ultimately carry through on the polemical project ('projection'), his emphasis on description—coupled with his willingness to critique aspects of Islamic belief[15] and his affiliation with various liminal Muslim communities[16]—no doubt contributed to his allegiances being called into question and to him ultimately being labeled as a heretic, that is, as one who blurs the boundaries.[17]

The second notable characteristic of the *Radd* is the criteria by which Abū ʿĪsā assesses the doctrines of the Christian sects. Abū ʿĪsā bases his refutation on two criteria: coherence with the Christian system of belief, and coherence with human reason or logic. Rather than explicitly subjecting the Christian doctrines to Islamic norms, such as those dictated by the Qurʾān,[18] he adopts "forms of argument … based exclusively upon principles which Christians

[13] Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 40.
[14] Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 9, 12; Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 3, 19-20. Thomas makes this argument in reference to the *Radd* and an earlier (lost) descriptive account of various religions within Muslim society, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*. See also David Thomas, "Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq and the History of Religions," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41 (1996): 275-290.
[15] Abū ʿĪsā's discussions of Islamic doctrines are focused on the view that prophetic status could not be affirmed based upon miracles; on the need for conformity between prophetic claims and reason; and on the role and status of revelation. Intriguingly, his critiques of Islam, similar to his critiques of other religions, stemmed from his prioritization of divine unity, *tawḥīd*, and reason. See Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 28-29; Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 25-29.
[16] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 18, 25-28.
[17] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 2.
[18] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 68.

would sanction and presumably employ themselves."[19] The criteria are highlighted throughout the treatise with almost every section ending with statements such as "This is contrary to your principles"[20] and "It is accepted both by us and others—and so none of them can disdain its rationality or entertain any possibility of doubt."[21] While the aim is certainly to show the shortcomings of Christianity, Abū ʿĪsā, through his knowledge of the 'other,' is able to base his critique upon what he envisions to be a common ground of discourse.[22]

The third aspect of the *Radd* that is striking is that, despite his extensive description and knowledge of Christian beliefs, his refutation focuses only on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Abū ʿĪsā targets "the two doctrines that most challenged the Muslim doctrine of *tawḥīd* ... irrespective of the beliefs and doctrines that Christians themselves emphasized."[23] His selection of these doctrines and his treatment of them in isolation from other aspects of Christian belief is thus a clear projection of Muslim self-identity onto the Christian 'other.' In other words, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are not only refuted because they are deemed 'illogical' or 'incoherent' within the Christian worldview, but also because they are a golden opportunity to espouse and define the distinctiveness of Muslim self-identity and the defining role of the doctrine of divine unity, *tawḥīd*, in that identity.[24] Furthermore, this move clearly indicates that Abū ʿĪsā's *Radd* specifically and other polemical works more generally are in fact equally apologetic;[25] they are as much about promoting the 'self' as devaluing the 'other.'

---

[19] Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 59.
[20] Thomas, *Anti-Christian*, 93.
[21] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 263.
[22] David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 139.
[23] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 18.
[24] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 74.
[25] Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 73. See also ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins: a Parallel English-Arabic Text*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010), xxiii.

The integration of polemical and apologetic objectives is perhaps best illustrated in the later writings of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), the Ashʿarī and Maliki jurisprudent who was born in Basra but spent most of his life in Baghdad.[26] In his *Kitāb al-tamhīd* (*Introduction*),[27] which was written upon request of the *amīr*, al-Bāqillānī offers refutations of both Christian and Jewish doctrines. While his argumentation in both instances is intriguing in and of itself, what is most remarkable about this work is its structure. The refutations of Christian and Jewish doctrines are woven into an overarching framework designed positively to outline central Islamic doctrines. As Thomas and Wadi Haddad both indicate, the refutation of Christianity follows positive articulations of the nature of knowledge and the nature of God.[28] Intriguingly, the refutation of Judaism is not grouped with refutations of Christianity but rather follows a discussion of the prophethood of Muḥammad. Each group is deliberately addressed in reference to the central Islamic doctrine from which they vary. As with Abū ʿĪsā, the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation challenge—and in doing so, perhaps, highlight the uniqueness of—the Islamic conception of God. With Judaism, the central contention resides not with their conception of God, but with their refusal to recognize the prophethood of Muḥammad and the abrogating nature of the Qurʾān.[29] This topical juxtaposition not only aims to invalidate Christian and Jewish doctrines, but to bolster and glorify the Islamic doctrines. As Thomas clarifies,

[26] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 119. See also R.J. McCarthy, "al-Bāḳillānī (i.e. the greengrocer), the ḳāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad b. Ḏjaʿfar b. al-Ḳāsim," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 1, 958.
[27] Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy, S.J. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957). *Al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (The Refutation of the Christians), which is part of this larger work, also appears in Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 143-203.
[28] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 122-124; Wadi Z. Haddad, "A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian's Refutation of the Basic Doctrines of Christianity: Al-Bāqillānī (d. A.D. 1013)," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 83-94, here 87.
[29] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 124.

> each group is thus held up as a counterexample to Muslim orthodoxy, and the weakness of its position, as al-Bāqillānī amasses arguments successively to demolish it, serves to prove that alternatives to the Islamic teachings are not viable. Thus, refutations of non-Muslim groups … contribute towards building the case of the total coherence of Islam and the rational absurdity of pursuing any alternative.[30]

Al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-tamhīd* also indicates another important shift within the polemical and apologetic discourse. While like Abū ʿĪsā, he relies primarily upon logic and knowledge of other traditions to refute many doctrines, he also explicitly invokes Islamic norms—for example the prophethood of Muḥammad, the necessity of accepting Muḥammad as a universal prophet, and the abrogating nature of the Qurʾān[31]—as definitive criteria. This is a notable departure from Abū ʿĪsā's "elaborate efforts to meet his opponents on their own ground,"[32] a departure that indicates a change in audience and context. Christians are no longer the primary interlocutors, and Christian ideas are no longer perceived to be as imminent of a threat as they were in the time of Abū ʿĪsā.[33] The primary objective for al-Bāqillānī—as evinced in the structure of his work and the explicit use of Islamic norms—is to clarify and correct beliefs and practices within the Muslim community. The 'other' is, thus, silenced and used to illuminate and reassure the faith of the 'self'.[34]

Another example of the foregrounding of Islamic norms is found in the concept of *taḥrīf*, or scriptural falsification, which emerges as a central evaluative criterion in many other refutations of Christianity and Judaism. This criterion was derived directly from Qurʾānic accusations[35] and was intimately tied to justifications for the necessity of the prophethood of

[30] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 124-125.
[31] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 121-122.
[32] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 139. Cf. Thomas, *Early Muslim*, 81.
[33] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 121.
[34] Haddad, "A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian's Refutation," 84-85; Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 121.
[35] For example, Qurʾān 2:75, "So can you [believers] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist (*yuḥarrifūnahu*) them, even when they understood them?"

Muḥammad and the reiteration of God's message in the Qurʾān. As such, the concept of *taḥrīf* was employed as a two-fold critique of religious 'others.' It was a critique of their treatment of their own scriptures and also a critique of their receptivity—or lack thereof—to Muḥammad and the Qurʾān.[36]

While such criticism abounded within Islamic discourse, its holistic application was impeded by another current of thought: the polemical argument that earlier scriptures foretold the coming of Muḥammad.[37] The dilemma should be clear: How could one argue for the falsification of earlier scriptures and revelations, while simultaneously calling Jews and Christians to acknowledge that those same scriptures predicted the prophethood of Muḥammad? Therefore, a variety of approaches to *taḥrīf* were espoused. Ghulām Ḥaider Āasī identifies three primary views: first, that the extant scriptures were corruptions and in no way identifiable with the revelations referred to in the Qurʾān as the *Zabūr*, *Tawrāt*, and *Injīl*; second, that corruption was found not in the scriptures but in the interpretation of the scriptures; and third, that *taḥrīf* was a combination of both corruption stemming from misinterpretation and corruption of some aspects of the text itself.[38]

An example of the first trend is found in Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad ibn Ḥazm's (d. 456/1064) *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal* (*Book on Religious Traditions, Ideologies, and Sects*).[39] Born in Cordova in Muslim Andalus, Ibn Ḥazm was a historian, poet, jurist, theologian and philosopher, and he is attributed with the codification of Ẓāhirī methodology and

---

أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَن يُؤْمِنُواْ لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلاَمَ اللّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ
and Qurʾān 5:13: "... They distort (*yuḥarrifūna*) the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember ..." يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُواْ حَظًّا

[36] Ghulām Ḥaider Āasī, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Ḥazm's* Kitāb al-faṣl fī al-milal wa-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986), 13.

[37] Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures,* American Academy of Religion, The Religions Series, no. 2 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 42; Āasī, *Muslim Understanding*, 39.

[38] Āasī, *Muslim Understanding,* 36. Cf. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 55-56.

[39] ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-faṣl fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal,* 5 vols. (Jeddah: ʾUqaẓ, 1982).

doctrine.[40] Although it began in relative economic and social comfort, Ibn Ḥazm's life was colored by ongoing political struggles between the Slavs, Berbers, and Andalusians. In these struggles, he was not simply a passive by-stander; rather, he was actively involved, being subjected to expulsion and imprisonment; engaging in military campaigns; and voicing harsh critiques of the political establishment and other schools of thought. In *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal,* Ibn Ḥazm presents a critique of non-Muslim religions, as well as a critique of Muslims sects. Through the application of Islamic norms and close textual criticism of Biblical scripture, he contends—in reference to Jews and Christians—that they have lost the complete revelation that they were initially granted[41] and that their scriptures are "rife with lies and errors and therefore untrustworthy."[42] Ibn Ḥazm is able to push this critique as far as he does precisely because he shows little interest in arguing for proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood based upon earlier scriptures.

In contrast to Ibn Ḥazm, the earlier work of ʿĀli b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 250/864), *Kitāb al-dīn wa al-dawla*, provides an example of the second approach.[43] Born in Ṭabaristān (in present-day Iran), al-Ṭabarī was a convert from Christianity, who utilized knowledge of his former tradition in his polemical writings.[44] In highlighting Biblical texts that he views as referring to Muḥammad, al-Ṭabarī implicitly accepts the validity of the scripture itself, but challenges the normative interpretations of the text within the Jewish and Christian communities.

---

[40] R. Arnaldez, "Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 3, 790.
[41] Robert G. Hoyland, *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society,* The Formation of the Classical Islamic World, vol. 18 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 225.
[42] Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 44.
[43] Āasī, *Muslim Understanding,* 38.
[44] David Thomas, "al-Ṭabarī," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 10, 17.

The third approach—an emphasis on corruption in interpretation and in parts of the text itself—is apparent in Shāfiʿī, Muʿtazilite theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī's (d. 415/1025) *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* (*The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood*).[45] In the section of this work which Gabriel Said Reynolds entitles the "Critique of Christian Origins," ʿAbd al-Jabbār's central contention is that Christianity is a "deviation from the religion of Christ."[46] Using a variety of sources, including Biblical texts, Christian liturgies, creeds and exegeses, ʿAbd al-Jabbār discusses the composition of the Bible, the contents of the Bible, Christian history, and Christian practice. While he acknowledges that there are parts of the Bible with authentic teachings, he nevertheless presents Christianity as a deliberate fabrication and a betrayal of Christ.[47] What is notable in the *Critique*, however, is that beyond textual criticism and eventual negative assessment, ʿAbd al-Jabbār endeavors to present a historical explanation of the falsification and corruption he envisions within Christianity.[48] As a contemporary of al-Bāqillānī, al-Jabbār wrote in a similar context of Muslim ascendency.[49] His *Critique* thus evinces a similar concern for his Muslim audience and a similar depiction of Christian voices as "muted and monotone."[50]

The concept of *taḥrīf*—in all of its three formulations—is not a means of positive valuation. It is most surely a projected criterion by which the 'other' is measured as deficient in reference to the 'self.' This projection derives not only from the fact that *taḥrīf* is a Qurʾānic accusation, but also from the underlying Islamic worldview. While part of *taḥrīf* implies invention, the main thrust of this concept relates to the idea of corruption or deliberate

[45] Āasī, *Muslim Understanding,* 39.
[46] Reynolds and Samir, *Critique of Christian Origins*, xlvi.
[47] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in a Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins,* Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xlviii, liii, 85.
[48] Reynolds and Samir, *Critique of Christian Origins*, l. See also Hoyland, *Muslims and Others*, 225.
[49] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 223.
[50] Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 216.

change. Unpacking the logical implications of this, a group cannot corrupt something if they do not have that 'something' to begin with. In other words, a group cannot corrupt or alter revelation if that group did not have revelation to begin with. *Taḥrīf*, while a negative assessment, is also an acknowledgment of the very real contact that God has had with these other communities. This continuity of contact is central to the Islamic worldview and Muslim self-identity. Islamic views on divine unity, unity of religion, and unity of guidance[51] coalesce and present Islamic thinkers with a distinct challenge: how to understand the 'other' who can never be wholly 'other.' Appeals to *taḥrīf*, and the related concepts of abrogation (*naskh*) and prophetic supersession, are all part of the historical attempt to grapple simultaneously with issues of continuity and discontinuity between 'self' and 'other.'

The challenge presented by the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other is also manifest in another characteristic of numerous polemical and apologetic writings. As was mentioned in reference to Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal*, many such works contain not only critiques of other religions but also critiques of 'heretical' sects within the Muslim community. Moreover, the critiques are frequently and purposefully intermingled in order to highlight similarities between the groups. For example, in *Kitāb al-fiṣal,* Ibn Ḥazm compares the Jewish view that Isaac's blessing for Esau could be effective for Jacob, to the Shīʿa view that Gabriel's revelation to Muḥammad was actually intended for ʿAlī.[52] Elsewhere, he links Christians with Manicheans, Jews, Shīʿa, and other Muslim heretics.[53] By drawing connections between various 'objectionable' groups, Ibn Ḥazm intends to encourage disdain for all such

[51] Āasī, *Muslim Understanding,* 254.
[52] Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 133; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, 1:138.
[53] Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 137-138; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, 2:5, 73-74.

groups.[54] Similar polemical associations are also present in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Critique of Christian Origins*.[55]

Throughout his expansive corpus of polemical and apologetic writings,[56] Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) also underscores the connections between the errors of other religions and the errors of heretical Muslim sects. An intensely polemical and political Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist, Ibn Taymiyya was born in Ḥarrān (in present-day Turkey) and died in Damascus.[57] He was appointed by various rulers to exhort individuals to partake in armed struggle and was himself engaged in expeditions against other groups. However, throughout his life, his zealous critiques of innovation and other Muslim groups resulted in multiple imprisonments. As Muhammad Memon indicates, Ibn Taymiyya had a very broad definition of innovation (*bidʿa*), wherein anything that did not derive directly from the Qurʾān, the *Sunna*, or the righteous ancestors (*salaf*) was excluded. This definition of innovation is directly tied to his redefinition of Qurʾānic exegesis, a redefinition that would have a major impact on later scholars, including Ibn Kathīr.[58]

In connecting the errors of other religions and the errors of heretical Muslim sects, Ibn Taymiyya goes beyond mere comparison of similar indiscretions to contend that intra-Muslim

---

[54] Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 133, 138.
[55] The placement of such critiques within the section of *Tathbīt dalāʿil al-nubuwwa* concerned primarily with Christianity is indicative in and of itself. Concrete examples include a discussion of the invalidity of Rāfiḍa (Shīʿī) claims about ʿAlī's primacy and modification of the Qurʾān, and a refutation of atheist/dualist claims in reference to Muḥammad. (Reynolds and Samir, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 53, 57, 61, 225, 261, 304.)
[56] For information on these works, in particular *Al-Sarim al-maslul ʿalā shatim al-Rasūl*, *al-Risāla al-Qubrusiyya*, *Masʾalāt al-Kanaʾis*, and *Iqtidaʾ al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*, see Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's* al-Jawab al-Sahih, ed. and trans. Thomas F. Michel, (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1999), 68-86.
[57] H. Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya, Taḳī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 3, 951.
[58] Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle Against Popular Religion with an Annotated Translation of His* Kitāb iqtiḍāʾ aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm, ed. and trans. Muhammad Umar Memon (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 86. For more on his hermeneutical approach, see Walid A. Saleh, "Ibn Taymiyyah and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of An Introduction to the Foundations of Qurʾānic Exegesis," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University, 2010), 123-162.

corruption is actually *caused* by contact with other religions. In *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* (*The Correct Reply to Those who have Altered Christ's Religion*),[59] a response to a revised letter originally issued by Paul of Antioch,[60] he argues that "the heterodox Muslim groups were not only culpable of the same fundamental errors, but also directly tainted by Christian teachings."[61] A similar perspective on the "corrupting influence"[62] of other religions is also evident in *Kitāb iqtiḍā' aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm* (*Book on the Necessity of the Straight Path, Opposing the Companions of the Fire*),[63] wherein Ibn Taymiyya endeavors to show that various manifestations of popular religion—such as festivals, intercession, and visiting graves—are borrowed from Christianity, Judaism, Sabianism, Zoroastrianism, and Arab "paganism."[64]

In order to combat the dire threat of such "foreign transplantations"[65] to the 'pure' Islamic community, Ibn Taymiyya states that it is necessary to establish complete distinction through limitations on interaction and assimilation. In other words, he is advocating for the same eradication of fuzziness on the borders that is stressed by Boyarin.[66] Heretical sects in particular are targeted by Ibn Taymiyya because they are transgressors of borders; they are "hybrids."[67] Ibn Taymiyya, through his stringent emphasis on dissimilarity in actions and beliefs and clear separation between communities[68]—including his 'pure' Islamic community

[59] Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* (Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Nīl, 1905); Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*.
[60] David Thomas, "Apologetic and Polemic in the *Letter from Cyprus* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*," in Rapoport and Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya,* 247-265, here 249-251. Cf. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 87-98.
[61] Thomas, "Apologetic," 258.
[62] Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shiʿi Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam," in Rapoport and Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 229-246, here 232.
[63] Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*.
[64] Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 5.
[65] Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 86.
[66] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xi.
[67] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xii.
[68] Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 97-99.

and heretical Muslim sects—aims to reestablish distinct borders between 'others' of all sorts and the small "beleaguered community of righteous within Islam."[69] Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya links the desire to be distinct to divine command and an increased understanding of Islam.[70] Ultimately, however, as Boyarin observes, establishing borders is not the end of the story; once defined, borders must be policed.[71] Ibn Taymiyya is equally cognizant of and committed to this secondary endeavor. For him, the polemical enterprise is not only about scriptural or dogmatic sparring. As evident in his political *fatāwa*, his military campaigns, and his pronouncements of *takfir*[72]—it is also about practical and concrete action in response to the immediate threat presented by the 'other.'

3. Delineations of Qurʾānic Difference: Exegetical and Juridical Trends

Just as Qurʾānic teachings served as a basis upon which to evaluate 'others' in polemical and apologetic writings, the Qurʾān also gave rise to another genre of discourse aimed at explicating religious difference. Mostly found in exegetical and juridical works, this discourse aimed to clarify the meaning of and boundaries between central Qurʾānic concepts, including *islām* (submission or devotion), *īmān* (faith), and *kufr* (disbelief).[73] Such clarification was of the utmost importance due to the divine evaluations—both positive and negative, in reference to

[69] Thomas, "Apologetic," 256.
[70] Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 97-99, 118.
[71] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 14.
[72] al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya," 233-234; Michel, A *Muslim Theologian's Response*, 56-58.
[73] While I here focus on these three concepts, there are other similar concepts that are involved in this discourse. These include *shirk/mushrik* (associationism/associator), *nifāq/munāfiq* (hypocrisy/hypocrite), *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Scripture), and *ḥanīf* (non-denominational monotheist). As part of her examination of exegesis on Qurʾānic Christians, Jane Dammen McAuliffe deals with some of the discourse related to *ahl al-kitāb*. One of the main issues in this body of exegesis is how to understand the Qurʾānic praise of Christians, Jews and *ahl al-kitāb*. McAuliffe explicates a variety of interpretative maneuvers adopted by exegetes in their efforts to limit the praise to particular—and small—contingents of these groups and/or to argue that the praised groups were actually converts to the path of Muḥammad. The investment in maintaining distinctions between 'self' and 'other' should not be overlooked. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

this world and the next—associated with each concept. If *islām* and *īmān* were divinely praised traits, then it was vital to understand what each entailed and who could legitimately be referred to as a *muslim* and a *muʾmin*. Equally was the case for the divinely condemned trait of *kufr*. In this section, I will discuss the major thematic concerns of this discourse, the central questions and topics that spurned feverish debates throughout Islamic history. In doing so, I will not recreate a comprehensive, chronological account, but rather I will utilize pivotal examples to illuminate the contours and nuances of each question and topic.

The discussion of the Qurʾānic concept of *islām* centered on three *āyāt* in *Sūrat āl-ʿimrān* and *Sūrat al-māʾida*:

> *True religion (*al-dīn*), in God's eyes, is* al-islām *...*[74]
>
> *If anyone seeks a religion (*al-dīn*) other than* al-islām*, it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter.*[75]
>
> *... Today I have perfected your religion (*dīnakum*) for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion (*dīnakum*)* al-islām *...*[76]

Unmistakably *al-islām* was something important, but the primary question that provoked great exegetical efforts was 'What precisely is *al-islām*?' Was it an action, a personal response to God? Was it an entity, a system or perhaps a group? Jane Smith has written an extensive comparative survey of exegeses related specifically to the Qurʾānic concept of *islām*.[77] Tracing the interpretations of fourteen historical and modern interpreters, she argues that early *tafsīr*, from the first to sixth centuries *hijra*, was characterized by both *tafsīr biʾl-maʾthūr* (exegesis carried out with primary reference to prophetic *aḥadīth*) and *tafsīr biʾl-raʾy* (exegesis

[74] Qurʾān 3:19 (excerpt): إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِندَ اللهِ الإِسْلاَمُ...
[75] Qurʾān 3:85: وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الإِسْلاَمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ
[76] Qurʾān 5:3 (excerpt): ...الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الإِسْلاَمَ دِينًا...
[77] Jane Smith, *A Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islām' as Seen in a Sequence of Qurʾān Commentaries* (Montana: Scholars, University of Montana, 1975).

based on personal opinion).[78] In both of these genres—and in the frequent combination of the two—exegetes expressed a variety of understandings of *islām*, many of which emphasized *islām* as an affirmation of *tawḥīd* (the unicity of God). In reference to one of the earliest exegetes—the first generation Companion of Muḥammad and "father of Qurʾānic exegesis"[79]—ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās Abūʾl-ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), Smith draws attention to Ibn ʿAbbās' linking of the concepts of *dīn* and *islām*, which results in an interpretation of *islām* as worship of God based on the recognition of God's oneness and uniqueness.[80] This general interpretation is further explicated in reference to Qurʾān 3:85, and Ibn ʿAbbās indicates that *al-islām*, as worship based on *tawḥīd*, is the shared message and teaching of all prophets that have been sent by God.[81]

Smith notes a similar emphasis on *tawḥīd* in the Qurʾānic commentary of the immensely influential historian and exegete Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). In *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āyāt al-Qurʾān*,[82] al-Ṭabarī similarly explores the meaning of the interrelated concept of *dīn* and depicts *islām* as humble submission and obedience.[83] Smith astutely notes that al-Ṭabarī emphasizes *islām* as an action; *islām* is seen as "man's response to God by humbling himself and entering into a state whereby he is in complete readiness to accept and fulfill the commands and desires of his Lord."[84] More specifically, according to al-Ṭabarī, *islām* is a personal—or individual—action performed with sincerity in verbal affirmation and sincerity of the heart.[85] As we will come to see, this multi-faceted view of *islām* as involving

[78] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 36-37.
[79] L. Veccia Vaglieri, "ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 1, 40.
[80] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 43.
[81] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 44.
[82] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āyāt al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubra al-Amīrīyah, 1900-1911).
[83] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān,* vol. 2, 510-511, *ad* Qurʾān 2:111-112.
[84] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 63.
[85] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān,* vol. 6, 274, *ad* Qurʾān 3:19. See also Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 63-64.

actions, verbal profession, and sincerity of the heart was debated by other exegetes, especially in light of Qurʾān 49:14.

Representing another interpretative approach more indicative of the genre of *tafsīr biʾl-raʾy*, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzi (d. 606/1209)—the Ashʿarī theologian and Shāfiʿī jurist commonly known as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi—approaches the concept of *islām* from a linguistic perspective. Al-Rāzi identifies various meanings of the term, including submitting/becoming a *muslim*, becoming secure or whole, and expressing sincerity in devotion.[86] Similar to al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzi, in all three of these possible interpretations, emphasizes *islām* as "an active approach on the part of the individual."[87] According to Smith, al-Rāzi's interpretation of *al-islām* focuses on a person's response to God and offers "no instance in which *al-islām* might have even a possible group reference."[88]

With the coming of the seventh century *hijra*, the enterprise of *tafsīr* came to be defined primarily by the "solidification of traditionalism," or by the prioritization of repetition of earlier exegeses and a "dwindling of individual interpretation."[89] This 'solidification' affected *tafsīr* in general, but also had a noticeable impact on interpretations of the concept of *islām* specifically. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is found in Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1373) *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*.[90] Ibn Kathīr—a Shāfiʿī scholar and student of Ibn Taymiyya, who lived mostly in Damascus—reiterates earlier interpretations of *islām* as a recognition of *tawḥīd* and a sincere response to that recognition.[91] Where Ibn Kathīr diverges, however—and is thereby indicative of the 'solidification' highlighted by Smith—is in his

[86] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzi, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb al-mushtahar biʾl-tafsīr al-kabīr* (Istanbul: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿAmirah, 1891), vol. 2, 628.
[87] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 108.
[88] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 117.
[89] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 119-120.
[90] Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1987).
[91] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 648.

further specification of the content of the *dīn* of *al-islām*. For Ibn Kathīr, *al-islām* is the specific, historical path of Muḥammad. Therefore, in reference to Qurʾān 3:19 and 5:3, Ibn Kathīr acknowledges *al-islām* as the religion of earlier messengers, but then stresses the role of Muḥammad in sealing, finalizing and perfecting earlier prophetic commissions. As such, all other paths, except for the path of Muḥammad, are closed and unnecessary.[92] Ibn Kathīr, thus, presents "a very specific emphasis on Muḥammad and the clear understanding that the *dīn* which he has made incumbent (*sharaʿa*) is the only acceptable one."[93] In intentionally and unequivocally linking *al-islām* with a historical community, Ibn Kathīr marks a pivotal move towards a "more reified concept of *islām*."[94] It is vital to note that the 'solidification' or reification evident in Ibn Kathīr is connected in many ways with his interpretative methodology. While not comprehensively implemented, Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* aimed to apply the hermeneutical approach outlined by his teacher Ibn Taymiyya, an approach that prioritized the Qurʾān, the prophetic traditions, and the traditions of the *salaf* (righteous ancestors).[95] This methodology—which largely excluded personal reflection or debate on possible meanings, and depended primarily on the previous historical interpretations of the *salaf*—seems to incline necessarily towards historical reification. Furthermore, with this as his underlying methodology, it is not shocking to find a similar trend towards reification—or the association of Qurʾānic categories with specific historical communities—reflected throughout his *tafsīr*.[96]

[92] Munʾim Sirry, "'Compete with One Another in Good Works': Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 424-438, here 425-428.
[93] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 131.
[94] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 134.
[95] Saleh, "Ibn Taymiyyah," 153. Also see footnote 58.
[96] For example, in his exegesis of *Sūrat al-kāfirūn* (Qurʾān 109:1-6), he acknowledges that *al-kāfirūn* (disbelievers) refers to all disbelievers but emphasizes it as a specific address to the disbelievers among the Quraysh. Also in *Sūrat al-bayyina* (Qurʾān 98:1-8), he specifies *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the Scripture) as being Jews and Christians only.

The interpretation of the Qurʾānic concept of *islām* was made more complex by the existence of numerous other *āyāt* that enjoin *īmān* and promise rewards for those who are *muʾmin*. If the 'true religion in the sight of God was *al-islām*' and elsewhere God praised *īmān*, what exactly was the relationship between the two concepts? Were *islām* and *īmān* the same thing? Or did they differ in some way? Al-Rāzi asserts that *īmān* is synonymous with *islām*. He develops this position in response to Qurʾān 3:83, which indicates that no other religion will be accepted by God except *islām*. As a result, if *īmān* and *islām* were not the same, then, by implication, *īmān* would not be accepted by God, a conclusion inconsistent with other Qurʾānic statements on *īmān*.[97]

While correspondence between *islām* and *īmān* seems obvious, explorations into the relationship between these two concepts were forced to account for another Qurʾānic *āya* in *Sūrat al-ḥujarāt* that appears to associate *islām* with submission in actions only and *īmān* with true conviction in the heart:

> *The Arabs say, "We have faith (*āmannā*)." Tell them, "You do not have faith (*tuʾminū*). What you should say instead is, 'We have submitted (*ʾaslamnā*),' for* al-īmān *has not yet entered your hearts." If you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish any of your deeds. God is most forgiving and most merciful.*[98]

In attempting to interpret this *āya*, many exegetes cited a well-known *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad defines *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* (excellence).[99] Indicative of the debates that had

[97] Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 108.

[98] Qurʾān 49:14: قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِن قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِن تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُم مِّنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

[99] Ḥadīth 2: "Also on the authority of Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him), who said: One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allāh (may the blessings and peace of Allāh be upon him) there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no signs of journeying were to be seen on him and none of us knew him. He walked up and sat down by the Prophet (may the blessings and peace of Allāh be upon him). Resting his knees against his and placing the palms of his hands on his thighs, he said: O Muhammad, tell me about *islām*. The Messenger of Allāh (may the blessings and peace of Allāh be upon him) said: *islām* is to testify that there is no god but Allāh and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh , to perform the prayers, to pay the *zakat*, to fast in Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so. He said: You have spoken rightly, and we were amazed at him asking him and saying that he had spoken rightly. He said: Then tell me about *īmān*. He said: It is to believe in Allāh , His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last

taken place before him, the exegesis of this *ḥadīth* offered by the eminent *ḥadīth* commentator and Shāfiʿī jurist Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277)[100] illustrates some of the complexity involved in the attempt to delineate between the two concepts. Al-Nawawī defines *īmān* as "assent" to the various tenets of belief explicated in the *ḥadīth* and *islām* as the externals of practice outlined in the *ḥadīth*.[101] He then utilizes this definition of *islām* to interpret Qurʾān 49:14 and contends that the Arabs mentioned in this verse—the ones who are told not to say they have *īmān*, but rather *islām*—were hypocrites and liars. Despite this, God acknowledged their external practices, practices which aligned with those required by God. Returning to the concept of *īmān*, al-Nawawī clarifies that "assent" means that one's tongue—literally what one professes or says—is aligned with what resides in one's heart. While al-Nawawī seems to have drawn a fairly clear line between *islām* as external actions, regardless of assent, and *īmān* as assent in tongue and heart, his distinction is not maintained. In the very next section of his commentary, he asserts that *īmān* is the "condition of validity" for the external acts of *islām*. However, if the hypocrites did not have *īmān*, yet God recognized their actions and called them *islām*, then how can having *īmān* be a precondition for the validity of *islām*? This undercuts the neat distinction he initially articulates.

Day, and to believe in divine destiny, both the good and the evil thereof. He said: You have spoken rightly. He said: Then tell me about *iḥsān*. He said: It is to worship Allāh as though you are seeing Him, and while you see Him not yet truly He sees you. He said: Then tell me about the Hour. He said: The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner. He said: Then tell me about its signs. He said: That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute herdsmen competing in constructing lofty buildings. Then he took himself off and stayed for a time. Then he said: O Umar, do you know who the questioner was? I said: Allāh and His Messenger know best. He said: It was Gabriel, who came to you to teach you your religion." Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *al-Nawawi's Forty Ḥadīth* (Matn al-arbaʿīn al-Nabawiyya), ed. and trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 6.

[100] Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn al-Nawawīya wa-sharḥu* (Manshīyat al-bakrā, Egypt: Dār ḥarāʾ lil-kitāb, 1987), 14-20. For a partial English translation of this commentary, see Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, "Ḥadīth Two" in *Classical Islam: a Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, ed. Norman Calder, J. A. Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin (New York: Routledge, 2003), 143-146. For the full commentary in French, see Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Une herméneutique de la tradition islamique : le commentaire des* Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīya *de Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (m. 676/1277)*, ed. Louis Pouzet, S.J. (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1982).

[101] al-Nawawī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*, 15.

While a clear-cut delineation between *islām* and *īmān* was appealing in its simplicity, it raised a series of new questions. Did this mean that the 'true religion in the sight of God' consisted in actions alone? Furthermore, did *īmān* involve not actions but only conviction in the heart? Could a person be a *muʾmin* and not perform any of the obligatory actions? Could a person be a *muʾmin* and sin? Ibn Taymiyya indicates a possible alternative interpretation of the same *ḥadīth* about *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* in his *Kitāb al-īmān.*[102] In his interpretation, Ibn Taymiyya does not depict *islām* and *īmān* as mutually exclusive categories with the former referring to actions alone and the latter referring to profession and assent. Rather, he argues that *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* are three hierarchical ranks (*darajāt/marātib*) within the religion sent to Muḥammad.[103] Thus, *iḥsān* is the apex that encompasses all elements of belief, action, and profession included in the lower *darajāt* of *īmān* and *islām.* Likewise, *īmān* encompasses all that is included in the lower rank of *islām.* According to Ibn Taymiyya,

> *Iḥsān* is a more inclusive concept than *Īmān*, but it also has a more specific sense than *Īmān. Īmān*, in turn, is a more inclusive concept than *Islām.* Thus, *Iḥsān* includes *Īmān*, which in turn, includes *Islām.* Consequently, *al-muḥsinūn*, the people of *Iḥsān*, are more distinguished that *al-muʾminūn*, the believers, and the believers are more distinguished than the Muslims.[104]

In placing the three in this hierarchy, Ibn Taymiyya is able to maintain the centrality of actions to *īmān*, something which al-Nawawī is less successful in doing due to his delineation between *islām* and *īmān.*[105]

---

[102]Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *al-Īmān* (Cairo: Maktabat Anas Ibn Mālik, 1980); Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, Kitāb al-īmān*: Book of Faith*, ed. and trans. Salman Hassan al-Ani and Shadia Ahmad Tel (Bloomington, IN: Iman Publishing House, 1999).

[103] Al-Ani and Tel, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 20-22.

[104] Al-Ani and Tel, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 24-25.

[105] Ibn Taymiyya argued that *īmān* was holistically comprised of verbal profession, actions, sincerity and alignment with the prophetic Sunna. He then defined *īmān* without actions as *kufr* (disbelief); profession and actions without sincerity as *nifāq* (hypocrisy); and—keeping in line with his polemic against innovation and internal diversity within the Muslim community—profession, actions, and sincerity without alignment with the Sunna as *bidʿa* (innovation). See Al-Ani and Tel, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 181-182.

The importance of actions to *īmān*, however, was not a novel position by Ibn Taymiyya's time; since early in Islamic history, many scholars had focused specifically on the concept of *īmān*, striving to understand its relationship to the verbal profession of faith (*shahāda/iqrār*), conviction of the heart (*taṣdīq*), and physical actions.[106] In his *Kitāb al-īmān*,[107] Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838)—the grammarian, Qurʾānic scholar and jurist who wrote largely on the *gharīb* (difficult linguistic passages) in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*[108]— outlines two dominant positions with regard to the meaning of *īmān*. The first is that *īmān* consists of conviction of the heart, verbal profession, and physical actions. The second is that *īmān* consists of conviction of the heart and verbal profession only. In assessing these two positions, Abū ʿUbayd depicts a progressive stage-by-stage elaboration of the concept of *īmān*.[109] *Īmān*, at the beginning of Muḥammad's prophethood and the revelation of the Qurʾān, was comprised only of witnessing, or verbal profession (*iqrār*). There were no specific actions required of people who made this profession. After the *hijra* to Madīna, however, God began to reveal specific commands and prohibitions. Abū ʿUbayd contends that "[w]henever a law was revealed, it became a part of what had already been established before. All of them became a part of what was called 'faith [*īmān*]' and those who followed them were called 'people of faith'."[110] With each such revelation, the definition of *īmān* was continuously expanded in order to encompass the required actions. To support this position, Abū ʿUbayd cites *aḥadīth* about the progressive increase in precepts of faith, and Qurʾānic *āyāt* about the interconnection between

[106] For an extensive overview of the various understandings of *īmān*, including those proffered by Ashʿarī, Ḥanafī, Ḥanbalī, and Shīʿī scholars, see L. Gardet, "Īmān," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 3, 1170.
[107] Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-īmān wa-maʿālimihi, wa-sunanihi, wa-istikmālihi, wa-darajātih* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983). See also Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, "Chapter on the Characteristics of Faith with Regards to Its Perfection and Its Stages," in Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, *Classical Islam*, 135-142.
[108] For more information, see H.L. Gottschalk, "Abū ʿUbayd al-Ḳāsim b. Sallām (the *nisba* varies between al-Baghdādī, al-Khurāsāni and al-Anṣārī)," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* vol. 1, 157.
[109] Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 11-12.
[110] Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 12; Abū ʿUbayd, "Chapter on the Characteristics of Faith with Regards to Its Perfection and Its Stages," 137.

the concept of *īmān* and actions. Abū ʿUbayd, moreover, argues that *īmān* (as sincerity, profession, and action together) has levels,[111] meaning that it is possible for a person to have more or less *īmān*. Since there are multiple components that comprise the category of *īmān*, it is feasible—and probable—that a person would not embody every single component or every single component to the same degree.

In line with the views of Abū ʿUbayd, a consensus ultimately developed that *īmān* involved conviction, profession, and action,[112] and, as such, was a multi-faceted concept that had various internal levels and degrees. Furthermore, *īmān*, as manifest in individuals, could fluctuate based upon an individual's knowledge, conviction, and performance of actions. With this consensus, however, the question became at what point does one cease to be a member of the category? In other words, where is the border, or the threshold, that distinguishes the *muʾmin*, the person with *īmān*, from the person without *īmān*?

While exegetes and jurists embraced the internal complexity and dynamism of *īmān*, they remained vigilantly committed to defining the border between *īmān* and the Qurʾānic concept of *kufr*, which was largely presented as the antithesis of *īmān*. In defining this border, scholars proffered various criteria. Abū ʿUbayd contends that the threshold criterion—that is, the border between *īmān* and the not-*īmān*—is the *shahāda*, the verbal profession. In reference to *īmān*, he states that "the beginnings of it and the highest point of it are the verbal utterance of the *shahāda*."[113] In other words, by verbally articulating the *shahāda*, a person enters into faith (*īmān*) and can accurately be referred to as a believer (*muʾmin*).

[111] Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 19.
[112] L. Gardet, "Īmān," 1170. Gardet correctly indicates that although a consensus developed around these three elements of *īmān*, there were numerous opinions on the relationship among, overlap of, and prioritization of the three elements. See also Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, "Chapter on the Characteristics of Faith," 134.
[113] Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 19; Abū ʿUbayd, "Chapter on the Characteristics of Faith with Regards to Its Perfection and Its Stages," 141.

The emphasis on the *shahāda* as a threshold criterion is also apparent in the official creed promulgated by the Abbasid Caliphs al-Qādir biʾllāh and al-Qāʾim bi-Amr Allāh in 430/1039 in Baghdad. Caliph al-Qādir espoused a Ḥanbalite-inspired perspective and was primarily concerned with "any doctrines deemed pernicious and especially those which constituted a danger to the caliphate."[114] Specifically, he sought to condemn Shīʿism, Muʿtazilism, and even aspects of Ashʿarism, and to reassert the obligatory status of venerating the Companions of Muḥammad. Recorded in ʾAbd al-Raḥman Ibn al-Jawzi's (d. 597/1200) *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa al-Umam*,[115] the Qādrī creed discusses various aspects of correct belief regarding the nature of God and the Qurʾān, and reiterates of a concept of *īmān* similar to that espoused by Abū ʿUbayd. *Īmān*, therein, is described as being a combination of speech, action and intention, which "increases by obedience and decreases by sin, and ... may be divided into parts and portions."[116] The creed acknowledges the primacy of the *shahāda* as a marker of *īmān*, but it also presents another criterion by which the boundary between *īmān* and *kufr* is illuminated. Citing a well-known *ḥadīth*,[117] it states that *kufr* was "not associated with the omission of any of the required acts other than prescribed prayer."[118] Thus, a person could neglect—and even reject the obligation of—other prescribed actions, including *zakāt*, *ḥajj*, and fasting, and still remain within the borders of *īmān*. With these dual threshold criteria, the *shahāda* appears to be the prerequisite criterion for entry into the category of *īmān*, whereas the lack of prayer appears to be the exit criterion from the category of *īmān*. In other words the *explicit* profession of faith would be required to be classified as a *muʾmin*, and

[114] D. Sourdel, "al-Ḳādir Bi'llāh," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 4, 378.
[115] ʾAbd al-Raḥman ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmīya, 1992). For partial English translation, see ʾAbd al-Raḥman ibn al-Jawzi, "On the Edicts of the Caliph al-Qādir," in Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, *Classical Islam*, 159-162.
[116] Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntaẓam*, 280-281; Ibn al-Jawzi, "On the Edicts of the Caliph al-Qādir," 161.
[117] "What lies between a man and disbelief is the abandonment of prayer." Recorded in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim.
[118] Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntaẓam*, 281; Ibn al-Jawzi, "On the Edicts of the Caliph al-Qādir," 161.

similarly—after the *shahāda*—the *explicit* lack of prayer would be required to be declassified as a *muʾmin* and reclassified as a *kāfir* (disbeliever).

What is remarkable about this is that both criteria are observable, and frequently public, actions. The political relevance and expediency of such criteria cannot be overlooked. Clear, publicly observable criteria for delimiting the boundaries of *īmān* and *kufr* are amenable to political enforcement of responsibilities, obligations, and consequences. The creed aims not only to mark the boundaries, but to apply tangible consequences to those who transgress and lie outside of the boundaries, to the *kāfirūn/kuffār* (disbelievers). This demarcation illuminates juridical practicalities in reference to religious difference in an Islamic society, and it is reminiscent of Boyarin's contentions about the intentional establishment and utility of clear—and enforceable—delineations.[119]

While the dual threshold criteria of Caliph al-Qādir biʾllāh's creed are designed to assist in the delineation and enforcement of a particular version of orthodoxy, other scholars, such as Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), employed threshold criteria in order to promote ecumenical tolerance. Born in Ṭūs (in present-day Iran), al-Ghazālī became an influential teacher and lecturer in Baghdad, and authored notable works on Ashʿarī dogmatics, philosophy, and the religious sciences. Ultimately abandoning his role in Baghdad to live as an ascetic mystic, al-Ghazālī was troubled by the fact that scholars of his day used religious knowledge to secure worldly advancement.[120] He was also deeply concerned, as is evident in his *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa* (*The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing*

[119] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 2.
[120] W. Montgomery Watt, "al-GHazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 2, 1038.

Islam from Masked Infidelity),[121] about "the atmosphere of intolerance, mutual suspicion, and psychological intimidation engendered by narrow and underinclusive definitions of orthodoxy manufactured and brandished with reckless abandon."[122] Narrow and arbitrary definitions of orthodoxy fostered rampant intra-communal labeling of groups as *kāfirūn*,[123] a phenomenon which in al-Ghazālī's view weakens the Muslim community. In response to this "veritable cyclone of charges and counter-charges of Unbelief [*kufr*]."[124] al-Ghazālī proffers a new threshold criterion for decisively distinguishing between *īmān* and *kufr*: "'Unbelief (*kufr*)' is to deem anything the Prophet brought to be a lie. And 'faith (*īmān*)' is to deem everything he brought to be true."[125] In articulating this criterion, al-Ghazālī is cognizant of the fact that many charges of *kufr* are based upon the view that another group has attributed lies to Muḥammad. Al-Ghazālī, therefore, clarifies by stating that 'deeming to be true' means "acknowledging the existence of everything whose existence the Prophet informed us of."[126] He, then, explicates five different levels of existence, including ontological, sensory, conceptual, noetic, and analogous existence. According to al-Ghazālī, an interpretation that is formulated at any of these levels conforms to the criterion of 'deeming to be true.'[127] This makes his criterion more inclusive of internal community diversity, especially diversity in

[121] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīya, 1961); Sherman A. Jackson, ed. and trans., *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī's* Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002).
[122] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 32.
[123] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 40.
[124] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 40.
[125] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 92.
[126] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 94.
[127] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 104, 52. Al-Ghazālī does, however, outline a "Rule for Figurative Interpretation," which states that while acceptable interpretation can be based on any of these levels, it must commence with the first (ontological) and have a logical proof (reason) for progressing to the next level of interpretation. Al-Ghazālī also argues that much of the debate between various Islamic schools is not based on commitment to the scripture, but rather on conflicting opinions about when to move between the various levels of existence in interpretation.

interpretation, while simultaneously safeguarding the foundational beliefs in God, the prophethood of Muḥammad, and the Hereafter.[128]

In light of his minimalist—yet inclusive—criterion, al-Ghazālī advises that it is best to refrain from judging individuals who have professed the *shahāda*, unless they explicitly claim Muḥammad lied. Such an explicit claim would quality as *kufr* and would necessitate condemnation. Al-Ghazālī is keen to note, however, that *kufr* only designates the rejection of the truthfulness of Muḥammad; it "reveals, *in and of itself*, virtually nothing about a person's moral or religious constitution."[129] To be a *kāfir*, therefore, is not necessarily to be immoral, irreligious, or devoid of worldly reward for positive deeds. This implies that one could be a *kāfir*, while professing the *shahāda*, doing righteous and obligatory actions, and having some degree of sincerity in the heart. Al-Ghazālī's singular criterion therefore could be seen as a reduction of Abū ʿUbayd's concept of *īmān* as sincerity, profession, and action together.

There is, nonetheless, a notable parallel between al-Ghazālī's description of various levels of 'existence' and Abū ʿUbayd's (among others) view of *īmān* as having degrees and levels. In both of these approaches, the internal makeup of *īmān* becomes increasingly intricate. It is dynamic, multi-faceted and comprised of various components. In contrast, however, the border between *īmān* and *kufr* is demarcated by increasingly simplified criteria. Both al-Ghazālī and Abū ʿUbayd permit complexity within the category of *īmān*, but they are simultaneously committed to clearly and simply defining the threshold between *īmān* and *kufr*. While there are many elements involved in *īmān* itself, there is only one element—the attribution of lies to Muḥammad or the *shahāda*—that marks the boundaries.

[128] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 47.
[129] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 7.

The combination of internal complexity and threshold simplification certainly serves a practical—whether positive or negative—role in human society. Delineations between *īmān* and *kufr*, though, are not only of import to social interaction and legal governance. They are also connected to soteriological endpoints in the Hereafter, as indicated in numerous Qurʾānic *āyāt* that describe *muʾminūn* as receiving rewards and Paradise and *kāfirūn* as receiving punishments and Hellfire. Therefore, questions arose about the correspondence of worldly delineations to soteriological delineations. Were worldly definitions and threshold criteria relevant to the topic of soteriology? Were there other factors that had to be taken into consideration? Could an individual be classified as a *kāfir* in one context, yet not in another?

As discussed, al-Ghazālī's criterion for distinguishing between *īmān* and *kufr* in this world is centered upon an individual's response to the prophethood of Muḥammad. While the centrality of Muḥammad's prophethood remains when al-Ghazālī moves to the discussion of soteriology, he does make an intriguing distinction between the legal and the actual status (comprehensive status in relationship to God) of individuals.[130] Legal status—as *muʾmin* or *kāfir*[131]—is based upon his previously discussed criterion. Actual status, however, is based not only upon response to but also upon exposure to the message of Muḥammad. Moreover, it is one's actual status that determines soteriological ends. Al-Ghazālī makes this distinction in recognition of the fact that some individuals legally classified as *kāfirūn* have never been exposed to the message. Specifically, he identifies three groups that are legally classified as *kāfirūn*: those with no knowledge of Muḥammad or his message; those with knowledge of

[130] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others'" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007), 41-42. Khalil refers to this as the distinction between legal and ontological status. While maintaining the content of his distinction, I have chosen to use the term 'actual' in place of ontological in order to avoid any confusion in reference to later discussions of ontology in the strict sense of the term.
[131] Al-Ghazālī also applies the legal and actual (ontological) distinction equally to the category of *muʾmin*, meaning that based on his criterion of truthfulness a person could be a legal *muʾmin*, but not an ontological *muʾmin* due to their deficiency in terms of actions, sincerity, et cetera.

Muḥammad, his message and character, who nonetheless reject the message; and those with knowledge of Muḥammad who have been misinformed as to his character and the message.[132] It is al-Ghazālī's view that divine mercy will be extended to the first and third groups,[133] and that the second is the only group that truly—meaning actually and thus soteriologically—can be classified as *kāfirūn*.[134] Their "conscious rejection"[135] warrants such an ascription, whereas the 'unconscious' rejection of the other groups makes them candidates for divine mercy. The prominent role of divine mercy in al-Ghazālī's soteriology permits a degree of flexibility in the boundaries between the righteous 'self' and the condemned 'other,' a flexibility not present in relation to legal distinctions.

According to Mohammad Hassan Khalil, however, there is important equivocation in al-Ghazālī's position. Al-Ghazālī

> includes a very important restriction when discussing the potential for non-Muslims to be included as candidates for God's mercy: They must believe in God and the Last Day. Thus, at least on the surface, al-Ghazālī's criterion is not meant to be inclusive of *all* non-Muslims who have not heard of the true nature of the Prophet.[136]

While al-Ghazālī permits one of the three fundamental conditions—the prophethood of Muḥammad—to be overridden based upon lack of exposure, he maintains the other two fundamental beliefs as non-negotiable prerequisites for divine mercy. Significantly, the non-negotiable beliefs in God and the Hereafter, according to al-Ghazālī, can be arrived at through a variety of non-revelatory means.[137]

---

[132] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 65, 127. See also Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 43-44.
[133] Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 126.
[134] Al-Ghazālī, however, also includes among this group individuals who have minimal exposure to Muḥammad and do not take the initiative to investigate further. See Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 127-128.
[135] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 43.
[136] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 49.
[137] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 49-50.

A similar consideration of the soteriological implications of exposure to the message of Muḥammad also appears in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya.[138] Ibn Taymiyya's one precondition for the obligation of believing in and following Muḥammad is that the message must have been presented; "[b]efore being taken to task, the 'invitation' (*da'wah*) to the faith of Muḥammad must have reached the individual."[139] Unlike al-Ghazālī, however, Ibn Taymiyya does not show any leniency to those who were unconvinced by the message for whatever reason. In fact, for Ibn Taymiyya, the message itself is inherently appealing and capable of being affirmed based upon reason.[140] Exposure in and of itself is sufficient to render its recipients culpable for any lack of belief. It is for this reason that Ibn Taymiyya—in contrast with al-Ghazālī—does not "elaborate on and differentiate between the various types of exposure to Muḥammad's Message."[141]

Ibn Taymiyya does, however, identify two conditions that make an individual liable for punishment in the Hereafter: first, receipt of the message from a Messenger, and second, knowledge that the acts one is performing are detestable or evil.[142] In reference to the latter, he contends that the human intellect can ascertain general categories of good and evil without revelation. He, however, prioritizes the former, arguing that no punishment could in fact take place until the message was sent. In an effort to construct a scenario in which "God will have sent a Messenger to everyone as a means of differentiating the righteous from the disobedient,"[143] Ibn Taymiyya invokes the notion of a Messenger of Resurrection[144] that will be sent in the Hereafter to test people who were not exposed to the message in the world. This

[138] The majority of his views on this topic are contained in various *fatāwā*. See Taqiyaddīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya* (Cairo: al-Shurafā' li-al-Tibā'ah wa Taṣwīr al-Mustanadāt, 1979).
[139] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 109.
[140] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 109, 111.
[141] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 114.
[142] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 111.
[143] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 113.
[144] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 113-114.

concept enables him to extend his worldly criteria to soteriological discussions. Acceptance of the message remains the primary criterion in this world and the next. Furthermore, through this extension, he is able to maintain clear distinctions between *muʾminūn* and *kāfirūn* and is not compelled to prioritize a new criterion—divine mercy—in a manner similar to al-Ghazālī.

Both al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya focus on the issue of exposure to the message, acknowledging it as a consideration unique to soteriological discussions. They, however, each adopt a different method for accommodating this consideration. Al-Ghazālī acknowledges an incongruity between legal and actual assessment of individuals. This acknowledgement implies that the legal criterion or criteria for distinguishing *īmān* and *kufr* cannot be applied holistically to actual and soteriological assessments. Actual and soteriological assessment will necessarily involve a complex consideration of multiple criteria, including response and exposure to the message (i.e., reception of revelation), divine ontology (i.e., divine mercy), and human capacity (i.e., what an individual could know without revelation). Ibn Taymiyya, on the other hand, acknowledges the issue of lack of exposure, but seeks to resolve this issue through the introduction of the Messenger of Resurrection, a concept that guarantees universal exposure to the message. Universal exposure permits Ibn Taymiyya to utilize the same criterion—acceptance of the message—in reference to worldly and soteriological delineations of *īmān* and *kufr*. While Ibn Taymiyya, like al-Ghazālī, acknowledges human capacity in reference to knowing good and evil, this capacity is secondary to the primary threshold criterion of acceptance of the message. After exposure to revelation, human capacity can better or worsen an individual's position, but it is not an independent criterion; human capacity alone cannot determine soteriological ends.

4. Theocentric Oneness and Differentiated Multiplicity: Mystical and Sufi Trends

As seen in the previous historical genres, divine ontology has played a central and recurring role in conceptions of the Muslim 'self' and the non-Muslim 'other.' Divine oneness determined many aspects of the polemical and apologetic discourse, and divine mercy was an essential component in soteriological discussions. The centrality of divine ontology continues in the final genre that I will discuss in this chapter, mystical or Sufi approaches to religious difference as exemplified in the writings of al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240)—the Sufi mystic and philosopher, who was born in Andalus and is deemed to be the most prolific and systematized of Sufi writers[145]—and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273)—the Persian poet and founder of the Mawlawiyya order of dervishes, who was born in Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan) and died in Konya (in present-day Turkey).[146] In the mystical genre, the conception of the divine ontology—particularly the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being)—defines both human anthropology and the role of revelation, and, consequently, forms the foundation upon which religious difference is understood and evaluated.

The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is frequently linked with Ibn al-ʿArabī. Although he does not use this terminology himself, the essential components of the doctrine originated with his teachings.[147] *Waḥdat al-wujūd* expresses the affirmation that there is nothing that truly and necessarily exists except *wujūd*, or God; "*wujūd* is the absolute and nondelimited reality of

[145] A. Ateş, "Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyi'l-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭāʾī, known as al-Shaykh al-Akbar," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 3, 707.
[146] H. Ritter and A. Bausani, "DJalālal-Dīn Rūmī b. Bahāʾ al-Dīn Sulṭān al-ʿulamāʾ Walad b. Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad Khaṭībī," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 2, 393. It would be interesting to explore the question of religious difference in respect to a number of other central mystical figures, including Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīya al-Qaysīya (d. 185/801), Manṣūr al-Hallāj (d. 309/922), Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221), and Shams al-Dīn Hāfiẓ Shīrāzī (d. 792/1390). I have, however, chosen to focus specifically on Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī due to the fact that their perspectives are the most frequently referenced—and debated—in contemporary writings.
[147] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʾArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 15.

God, the 'Necessary Being' (*wājib al-wujūd*) that cannot not exist."[148] While indefinable in its true essence, *wujūd* does manifest in the created world. Utilizing the analogy of Light, Ibn al-ʿArabī describes *wujūd* as pure Light, Light which is invisible in and of itself but which makes everything else visible. This disclosure in the created world establishes a vital relationship between the one *wujūd* and the many created entities. As William C. Chittick notes, this explains why Ibn al-ʿArabī also and equally stresses the "manyness" of existence as being real. Multiplicity in creation is not an illusion, but it is also not independent from the *wujūd*.[149] On the basis of the same light analogy, the multiplicity of creation is comparable to the various colors produced when the one Light passes through a prism. The colors are real in that they manifest the one Light, but they do so in a delimited fashion contingent upon the properties and characteristics of the prism.

Rūmī also invokes this same analogy, describing the divine as Light which is "only lent to created forms and beings."[150] God is the only thing that has true existence and can therefore manifest that existence in the created order. Rūmī highlights the irony of the fact that the "world of nonexistence appears as existent things, and that world of Existence is exceedingly hidden."[151] This observation is connected to a distinction he draws between the created form (*ṣūrat*), or outward appearance, and the meaning (*maʿnā*), the inward reality. This distinction, however, does not imply a lack of real relationship between the two, but rather that distortions can easily result from ascribing excessive importance to the "form and not

[148] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* 15.
[149] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* 16. See also William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 56-57.
[150] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalāluʾuddīn Rūmī*, ed. and trans. R. A Nicholson, 8 vols. (London: Luzac, 1925-1940), II, 2124-2127.
[151] Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, II, 1280, cited in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: the Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York, 1983), 24, 175.

understanding that it derives its existence and significance from meaning."[152] There is always a danger in paying isolated attention to shadows, rather than giving priority to the source, the Light itself.[153]

For both Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī, the very purpose of creation is to manifest the divine essence. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, every created entity displays some aspect—however delimited—of *wujūd*. Although God remains perpetually free from the creation, God manifests the divine names and attributes in the created world.[154] Rūmī, quoting a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī*, expresses a similar position: "God says, 'I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted to be known.' In other words, 'I created the whole of the universe, and the goal in all of it is to make Myself manifest, sometimes through Gentleness and sometimes through Severity.'"[155] The concluding mention to two prominent divine attributes, gentleness (i.e., mercy) and severity (i.e., wrath), accentuates another key element of his perspective. God does not only manifest in what is typically deemed from a human perspective to be positive qualities. God simultaneously manifests in both positive and negative ways, in opposites, for example, good and evil or belief and unbelief.[156] According to Rūmī such oppositions are not only relative—nothing is absolutely good or absolutely evil—they are also uniquely designed to disclose further the complex divine essence. As such, both aspects of the opposition are affirmed as 'good' and 'perfect' in reference to the performance of the "one task" of manifesting God.[157]

The manifestation of divine names and attributes in the created order is directly linked to anthropology, or the situation, purpose and goal of humankind. While other created entities

[152] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 24.
[153] "Form is the shadow, meaning the Sun." Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, VI, 4747, cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 19.
[154] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 21-22.
[155] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Discourses of Rūmī* (Fīhī mā fīhī), trans. A. J. Arberry (London: John Murray, 1961), 184, cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 48.
[156] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 49, 53.
[157] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 54.

manifest particular attributes or names, the human being is the only creation that has the potential to manifest all of the divine names and attributes. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī describes the apex of the Sufi path, the 'perfect man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), as "the complete and total human being who has actualized all the potentialities latent in the form of God."[158] In fully actualizing the divine potentialities, *al-insān al-kāmil* is not only the highest form a human can achieve, it is also the only "proper" form, the only true expression of humanity created in the form of God.[159] Depicting Adam as the prototype of spiritual perfection, Rūmī describes humankind as the potential "mirror of all things," the mirror of all attributes of God.[160] The earthly charge is, therefore, "to cleanse his heart, polish it, and make it a perfect mirror reflecting God."[161] The goal is the annihilation of the human ego, *fanāʾ*, in order to actualize the full manifestation of divine attributes and to 'subsist' in God, *baqāʾ*.[162]

Ibn al-ʿArabī devotes significant effort to outlining the process whereby such actualization is realized. He argues that the divine attributes are part of human nature, or *fiṭra*, given to all at the time of creation. In the majority of individuals, though, the attributes exist in a state of disequilibrium, with some dominating others.[163] In order to actualize the divine attributes fully and holistically, a state of balance or equilibrium is required. How can such a state be achieved? Ibn al-ʿArabī offers an unequivocal response: equilibrium, and therefore full actualization, can only be achieved by following divine revelation and the examples of the prophets. While rational inquiry can reveal insights into the incomparability of God, positive

[158] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 23.
[159] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 37.
[160] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 61, 65.
[161] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 39.
[162] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 179-181.
[163] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 62-63.

knowledge of God can come only from God's self through revelation. Hence, Ibn al-ʿArabī adamantly proclaims the requirement of following revealed *sharīʿa*, revealed religion:

> The Shariah provides the necessary concrete guidelines for achieving equilibrium among the names and character traits. Having reached this equilibrium, human beings will have actualized the form in which they were created.[164]

Sharīʿa also features prominently in Rūmī's understanding of the process by which the human 'mirror' is polished to perfection. Simultaneously stressing the importance of Law, Way, and Reality (*sharīʿa*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ḥaqīqa*), Rūmī argues that the only source of the first two is revelation and prophetic example.[165] Since God does not communicate directly with every individual, it is necessary to have guidelines and a "guide" to imitate:[166]

> God does not speak to everyone, just as the kings of this world do not speak to every weaver. They appoint ministers and representatives so that through them people may find the way to them. In the same way God has singled out certain servants, so that everyone who seeks Him may find Him within them. All the prophets have come for this reason. Only they are the Way.[167]

Significantly, Rūmī here broaches the topic of other prophets. In doing so, he acknowledges the diversity of prophetic examples, while stressing that they have all been sent for the same purpose: to guide others to the Way.

Ibn al-ʿArabī voices a related view of the shared purpose of prophets, but he also endeavors to provide an explanation for the particularities of each revealed *sharīʿa*, an explanation of the "ontological roots of religious diversity."[168] He asserts that while revelations are all based on the essential message of *tawḥīd*, divine oneness, their particularities result from the fact that in order to have any impact revelation must resonate with the "diverse

[164] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 44.
[165] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 10.
[166] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 182.
[167] Rūmī, *Discourses*, 237, cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 122.
[168] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 155.

dispositions" of people who receive it.[169] In stating this, Ibn al-ʿArabī recognizes the role of individual and group context on the delivery and reception of the message; for a message to have relevance to a particular audience, it must be comprehensible within an existential and temporal context.[170]

If all prophets serve the same function and all differences represent responsiveness to context broadly construed, does this indicate that it is acceptable to follow the *sharīʿa* of any prophet, to follow any revealed religion? Or is one better than another? Ibn al-ʿArabī's reply is found in his comparison of the relationship between the revealed religion of Muḥammad and those of other prophets to the relationship between the sun and stars:

> All the revealed religions (*sharāʾīʿ*) are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the light of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist ... This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] ...[171]

This excerpt foregrounds a number of essential points. The first is that all revealed religions reflect the divine light, and this light is never negated; rather, the lights of the 'stars' are outshone by the light of the 'sun.' In other words, other revealed religions remain true, but the religion of Muḥammad is "all-inclusive," embodying all of the guidance previously granted. In reference to the last statement in this excerpt, Ibn al-ʿArabī elsewhere distinguishes between having 'faith' in other prophets, that is, believing them to be truthful, and having 'faith' in the specific religion of Muḥammad, that is, implementing his model in practice.[172]

---

[169] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 124, 154, 175.
[170] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 158-159.
[171] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Fūtūhat al-Makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911), II 153.12; Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125.
[172] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 155.

Rūmī also utilizes the analogy of the sun to characterize the relationship among prophets. Castigating those who would deny any prophets, he describes prophets as a "single light shining from a single sun."[173] Yet he continues by stating that although a single sun, the 'sun of yesterday'—previous prophets—is not the same as the 'sun of today'—Muḥammad—due to the fact that previous suns no longer have the capacity to test people. Rūmī thereby introduces an aspect of context similar to Ibn al-ʿArabī: the prophetic message must resonate with and provoke its audience. For Rūmī, the message of Muḥammad—the 'sun of today'—is the one best suited to do so. Rūmī's privileging of Muḥammad is also evinced in other descriptions of Muḥammad as "king of the prophets;" as the one who achieved the highest possible state of perfection; and ironically even as the sun itself.[174]

The revealed religion of Muḥammad is further extolled in Ibn al-ʿArabī's description of a variety of 'Paths.' The first is the 'Path of God,' which refers to the mere relationship of every existing thing to the nondelimited *wujūd*; it refers to the fact that everything is created by and will return to God. As such, it is "the general path upon which all things walk, and it takes them to God. It includes every divinely revealed religion and every construction of the rational faculty. It takes to God, and it embraces both wretched and felicitous."[175] The second is the 'Straight Path of the Blessing-Giver,' the path revealed to and modeled by all prophets. It is a path that leads not only to God—as did the first path, and as do all paths—but also to felicity.[176] The third path is the specific 'Path of Muḥammad,' which Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to as "God's firm cord and all-comprehensive Law."[177] Even though he recognizes and affirms the validity of the diverse revealed Laws and their potential for leading to some form of felicity, he reiterates the

[173] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 124.
[174] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 124, 61.
[175] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 145. See also Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 302-303; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Fūtūhat,* III 410.24.
[176] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 303. See also Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 145.
[177] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 303.

previous description of the Path of Muḥammad as being all-inclusive; "the property of all the revealed religions has been transformed to his revealed religion. His revealed religion embraces them, but they do not embrace it."[178] As a result, the Path of Muḥammad promises a unique and more comprehensive form of mercy and felicity. This aligns with Ibn al-ʿArabī's depiction of the Muḥammadan friends of God in juxtaposition with other friends of God. While he acknowledges friends of God who follow other prophets, he asserts that Muḥammadan friends of God—of which he claims to be the Seal—"will inherit the totality of the prophetic works, states, and sciences, a totality realized by Muhammad alone among the prophets."[179] This unique inheritance places them in the Station of No Station. Whereas other friends inhabit particular stations (*maqāmāt*) of spiritual development, Muḥammadan friends have knowledge of all the stations and thus simultaneously "stand with Muhammad in every station and in no station."[180]

Ibn al-ʿArabī's delineation of the various paths is also based upon differentiation between what Chittick terms the Engendering Command and the Prescriptive Command.[181] The former is the creative command, the connection of all creation to *wujūd*. The prescriptive command of God, in contrast, refers to the specific and restrictive instructions God provides on how to achieve felicity. Whereas all paths relate to the engendering command—"all paths lead to God"—only the paths of the Blessing-Giver and Muḥammad, the paths of revealed religion, relate to the prescriptive command. It is based upon this that Ibn al-ʿArabī is able to simultaneously affirm the 'truth' of all paths, and the necessity of following revealed religion and prophetic examples. All paths are 'true' because they correspond in some manner to the

[178] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 146.
[179] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 8.
[180] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 9.
[181] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 141-142; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 292-293.

reality of *wujūd*, but not all paths have a positive impact on "human becoming," or balanced actualization of the divine attributes.[182]

This is precisely Rūmī's view on the manifestation of divine attributes in creation in the form of opposites. When Rūmī contends that both aspects in opposition perform "one task," he is speaking in reference to the engendering command. Like Ibn al-ʿArabī, he is quick to note that the goodness or perfection of opposites is only in relation to God, not in relation to human beings.[183] Rūmī emphasizes this by differentiating between what God 'wills' and what God 'approves' or commands. All created things will return to God based upon the former, the ontological will of God. Only some, however, will return to—or gain proximity to—God based upon their response to the latter, the deontological will of God.[184] In regard to the deontological path of return, Rūmī does recognize the existence of Heaven and Hell, but he asserts that, similar to other opposites, the purpose of the opposites of Heaven and Hell is to manifest God.[185] With death, resurrection, and the Day of Justice, manifestation is completed and therefore the need for opposition dwindles. In the eschatological state, divine gentleness (mercy) dominates and colors divine severity (wrath). As part of this mercy, every person is made completely aware of the nature or his or her spirit—of the 'meaning' of his or her 'form'—and the character of death is determined by that nature: "Everyone's death … is the same color as himself."[186] The correspondence of eschatological status to worldly status also implies that some will reside in Hell and others in Heaven, but that, consistent with the

[182] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 139, 165. Ibn al-ʿArabī also characterizes this as the distinction between 'God as God' (engendering command) and 'God as Guide' (prescriptive command). (Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 172.)
[183] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 54-56.
[184] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 92. The distinction in this situation between ontological and deontological is drawn from Mohammad Hassan Khalil. (Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 84.)
[185] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 91-92.
[186] Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, II, 3439, cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 102.

multiplicity of ranks and degrees of spiritual actualization in this world,[187] there will also be a number of ranks and degrees in the next. Moreover, Rūmī also describes inhabitants of Hell as happy due to their new found awareness: "The inhabitants of hell are happier in hell than they were in this world, since in hell they are aware of God but in this world they were not. And nothing is sweeter than awareness of God."[188]

Ibn al-ʿArabī's conception of eschatology has many parallels with that of Rūmī. He, in the same way, contends that the primary function of Heaven and Hell is to manifest the divine attributes and names.[189] He also describes an extensive range of possible destinies, each tied intimately to worldly status.[190] Rather than stressing a binary conception of Heaven and Hell, he emphasizes the fact that the posthumous realities will be determined individually and distinctly based upon a complex assessment of works, ideas and thoughts. This assessment could result in a multitude of ends, reflecting various degrees of human equilibrium and disequilibrium in the world. Furthermore, Ibn al-ʿArabī in no way confines paradise, or Heaven, to Muslims.[191] This aligns with his view that followers of other prophetic paths can achieve felicity and become friends of God. As with Rūmī, the divine attribute of mercy is seen as taking precedence over divine wrath,[192] and as such Ibn al-ʿArabī states that there will be a "cooling of the Fire" of Hell; "Hell's chastisement must disappear because in the end … mercy will show its precedence and priority."[193] This 'cooling' will result in the inhabitants of Hell experiencing felicity. The felicity of the inhabitants of Hell, however, will differ from the

[187] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 246.
[188] Rūmī, *Discourses*, 236, cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 107.
[189] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 112; Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 155.
[190] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 137-138.
[191] Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 103.
[192] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 112, 169; Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions," 95.
[193] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 113.

felicity of the inhabitants of Heaven in that the former will be veiled (*maḥjūb*) from God and the latter will have a vision (*ruʾya*) of God.[194]

By way of concluding this section, it is helpful to explicate some additional implications of the mystical approach for religious difference and religious identity. The first is that human identity is not defined primarily in reference to the human 'other;' rather, human identity is theocentrically defined in reference to *wujūd* or God. The only 'other' that can serve as a counterpoint for articulating identity is the *wujūd* itself as its nondelimited nature illuminates the delimited nature of all humans and all 'forms.'[195]

Mystical approaches also emphasize a universal human purpose defined in reference to *wujūd*. Humankind is created by God to manifest God and is judged in reference to the actualization of that manifestation. The achievement of perfect actualization is connected to annihilation of the ego, or effacement of self-identity, *fanāʾ*. On this level, the ultimate goal is not to solidify membership in a particular group or establish discrete boundaries that define that group. The goal, in contrast, is to eradicate such delimited conceptions of 'self' and formal boundaries, all of which impede recognition of the reality of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. One intriguing aspect of this, however, is that in order to eradicate delimited conceptions of 'self' and 'other'—in order to recognize the ontological reality that there is only really *wujūd*—one must adopt a delimited deontological path, one must follow the path of revealed religion.

The deontological command—and particularly the emphasis on the specific Path of Muḥammad—asserts that there is only one way to full actualization. One must follow the delimited path to reach the nondelimited reality. Or, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's terminology, one must

[194] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 116.
[195] It is worth noting that divine oneness, *tawḥīd*, also played a role in polemical and apologetic delineations of 'self' and 'other.' However, there divine oneness was a tenet to which people ascribed or did not ascribe. In the mystical approach, identity is not defined based on ascription to the tenet, but rather identity is defined based upon 'oneness' itself.

utilize the revealed 'knots' to gain an awareness of the existence of knots (delimitation), untie detrimental knots (beliefs not based on revelation), and acknowledge of the possibility of untying all knots (achieving *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ*).[196] As such, the mystical approach presents an ongoing oscillation between universalism and particularism, between undifferentiated oneness and specificity. Both are asserted, while neither is negated.[197]

Another example of this oscillation is evident in the dual emphases on egalitarianism and hierarchy. While the view of humankind in potential form and in ontological reference to the *wujūd* is egalitarian through and through, the path of authentic actualization is exceedingly hierarchical. Only very few ever reach the goal of perfection, and most linger in intermediate degrees. Significantly, the hierarchy of actualization depicted in this approach is not a linear hierarchy, meaning it is not a hierarchy accessible only through one path. With the exception of the uppermost echelon of actualization, the hierarchy is not confined to or affiliated with only one religious identity. Individuals do not have to follow the Path of Muḥammad in order to embark upon and progress in actualization; the other Paths of the Blessing-Givers also enable degrees of actualization. Complexification of the hierarchy, however, should not be misconstrued as an obliteration of all boundaries. The boundaries remain in the deontological frame of reference, although the threshold is pushed back to allow partial inclusion of other prophetic paths. While actualization is not confined to one religion, it is still confined to revealed religion and prophetic examples. This again underscores the oscillation of the ontological and deontological relationship between humans and God.

[196] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 173-175. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, all beliefs—including the beliefs of revealed religion—are delimited representations of *wujūd*, or 'knots.' Revealed 'knots', however, are "providential" because they disclose new perspectives and insights directly from the divine source.
[197] It is true, though, that oneness is prioritized to a degree; it is the true reality of existence.

Ontologically, all paths—all ways of life, belief, unbelief, good and evil—return to God. Deontologically, only some open the way to actualization and 'unveiled' proximity to God.

5. Conclusion

In sum, the historical Islamic discourse on religious difference displays an array of approaches to identifying the Muslim 'self' and the non-Muslim—or heretical—'other.' More specifically, the historical discourse is characterized by repeated attempts to grapple with an other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other, an 'other' who is different yet somehow always connected. Francis Peters—in his exploration of the Qurʾānic definition of Christianity—refers to this as a situation of "problematic continuity,"[198] in which self-identity is simultaneously defined by distinguishing 'self' from 'other' and establishing a correlation between 'self' and 'other.' Moreover, the diverse strands of the historical discourse have resulted from the fact that the dialectical articulation of otherness and self-identity is never finalized or fixed; rather, it is a process whereby 'self' and 'other' are continuously and contextually "assembled and reassembled."[199]

In this complex dialectical process of constructing, clarifying and enforcing otherness and self-identity, the genres surveyed this chapter converge around a number of central themes. These themes include the implications of divine ontology (primarily divine oneness and mercy) for assessing the human 'other'; the depiction of created anthropology (the status of humans without revelation and the purpose of humanity); the relationship between various revelations and prophets (issues of *taḥrīf*, supersession, completion, and the necessity of affirming Muḥammad); and the legal and soteriological explication of Qurʾānic categories

[198] Francis Peters, "*Alius* or *Alter*: The Qurʾānic Definition of Christians and Christianity," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (1997): 165-176, here 169-170.
[199] Peters, "*Alius* or *Alter*," 174.

(definition of threshold criteria and internal composition). As will be seen in Chapter Three, these same themes recur in the contemporary Islamic discourse.

While largely centered on recurring questions and concerns, the historical discourse, however, has not been monolithic or homogeneous. It has been characterized by intense debate and diversity of interpretation. The primary concerns are clear, but conclusions have varied based upon numerous factors, including intended audience, historical and political context, and experiences of religious diversity. By way of concluding this chapter, I would like to make three general observations in relation to these factors.

First, with regard to the topic of audience, it is notable that, with the possible exception of Abū ʿĪsā, the majority of the perspectives surveyed are not directed to the religious 'other.' Rather, the religious 'other'—in the form of other religions or other Islamic groups—is used as a means of articulating the particularities of the religious 'self.' As a result, there is little evidence of complex or dialogical engagement with the 'other.' Intriguingly, scholars that did present more nuanced information on the 'other' were subjected to accusations of heresy (as with Abū ʿĪsā) or had a more limited impact within the historical discourse as a whole (as with al-Ṭabarī).[200]

Therefore—and this is the second observation—the historical discourse should not be construed as a simple intellectual exercise; rather, it is a response to particular contextual issues, especially political issues related to governance and religious orthodoxy. Many of the scholars discussed in this chapter were political appointees or affiliates of various rulers; they were appointed to establish a basis upon which religious difference could be assessed, and they were frequently responsible for enforcing that assessment. Therefore, their intellectual efforts

[200] See Thomas, "al-Ṭabarī," 17.

had to be amenable to practical implementation, as seen, for example, in Abū ʿUbayd's dual threshold criteria. Even scholars that periodically found themselves at odds with the administrative authority—such as Ibn Taymiyya—were still invested in the relationship between political authority and the faith.[201] The intimate historical relationship between the discourse on religious difference and political power is especially significant due to the fact that the perspectives of historical scholars—such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr—are widely invoked in the contemporary context of the United States, where the Islamic faith is not linked with political power. More importantly, they are invoked without due consideration of the divergent political and power contexts.

A final, important observation about the historical discourse is that the tangible existence of religious diversity seems to have done little to promote appreciation for such diversity. In most cases, the immediate presence of religious diversity actually fostered more fervent theological and physical aggression. Moreover, some of the more inclusive perspectives on religious diversity emanate from mystical scholars, but there exists debate over the extant of the mystical scholars' actual knowledge of and interaction with other traditions.[202] The fact that immediate experience of diversity does not necessarily lend itself to appreciation is an especially vital consideration in reference to the contemporary appropriation of historical ideas, since the contemporary discourse is generally based on the reverse assumption, that is, that greater interaction and exposure leads to—or at least necessitates—greater understanding and appreciation.

[201] See Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya," 951.
[202] Jacques Waardenburg, "Muslim Studies of Other Religions: The Medieval Period," in Hoyland, *Muslims and Others*, 211-239, here 219.

Chapter Three

Sameness and Difference in Contemporary Islamic Approaches to Religious Diversity

1. Introduction

Contemporary Islamic approaches continue to raise a number of provocative and pointed questions about the existence, value, and functionality of religious difference. What does the Qurʾān say about Judaism, Christianity, and other religions?[1] Is Islam the only 'valid' religion in the present time?[2] Are all religions particular expressions of an ineffable Divine unity?[3] Is Islam the only acceptable and salvifically effective path? Or are there multiple paths?[4] Are non-Muslims capable of achieving salvation, however defined? If so, do they achieve salvation because of their religion or in spite of their religion? Is salvation even the central issue?[5] In responding to these specific questions and in offering more general explications of religious difference, contemporary scholars frequently refer to the same themes identified in the historical discourse: divine ontology, created anthropology, revelation, and Qurʾānic categories. As such, contemporary discourse represents a continuation of the multivalent historical tradition.

In addition to the sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit perpetuation of historical preoccupations, contemporary discourse is also responsive to unique contemporary concerns,

[1] For example, Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity*.
[2] For example, Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*.
[3] For example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Religion and Religions"; Shah-Kazemi, *The Other*.
[4] For example, Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism."
[5] These questions are those which dominate the contemporary Islamic discourse. The scholars who I will discuss in this chapter each address some if not all of these questions.

especially those that arise in relation to the fact that religions—or religious individuals—intermingle and live side by side to a degree never before seen. This lived reality provokes new and pressing questions about the status of and interaction with the 'other.' The other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other in theological terms has now, more than ever, become the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other in physical and practical terms as well. Thus, in the contemporary discourse, practical and theological concerns converge with scholars aiming to provide a roadmap for a world permeated with religious diversity, a roadmap that simultaneously remains faithful to the self-understanding(s) of the Islamic tradition and enables productive and practical coexistence.

Another factor that has shaped contemporary Islamic discussions is the field of theology of religions. As touched upon in the introduction, this field aims to provide a comprehensive theological account for the phenomenon of religious diversity. Though initially developed by Christian theologians in response to the issue of salvation, contemporary Islamic scholars have begun increasingly to engage the field. This engagement has resulted in Islamic articulations of the soteriological status of religious 'others,' examinations of Islamic perspectives towards specific religious groups, and attempts to formulate overarching accounts of the origin, value, and purpose of religious diversity.

In this chapter, I will limit my focus to the last area due to the fact that my ultimate goal in this study is to articulate a similar formulation by building upon the strengths of existing approaches and attempting to overcome some of their perceived shortcomings. More specifically, I will focus on those contemporary Islamic approaches to theology of religions

written in English which feature prominently in scholarly discourse in the United States.[6] The scholars I will examine are Asghar Ali Engineer, Abdulaziz Sachedina, Mahmut Aydin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Reza Shah-Kazemi, Muhammad Legenhausen, Farid Esack, and Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī. Although not all of these scholars are physically located within the United States, their writings on religious diversity have nevertheless shaped the discourse within the United States. However, it is important to note that their diverse backgrounds and contexts have necessarily influenced their work. Some of these scholars, such as Engineer and Esack, have been compelled to write on religious diversity due to their firsthand experience of religious intolerance. Others, such as Sachedina, Nasr and al-Fārūqī, have written in the context of religious pluralism and academic discussions thereof within the United States. Additionally, these scholars represent various philosophical and theological perspectives, including Shīʿism (Engineer, Sachedina, Shah-Kazemi, Nasr, and Legenhausen), Sunnism (Aydin, Esack and al-Fārūqī), and Sufism/Perennial Philosophy (Nasr and Shah-Kazemi). This diversity is of great value in the current study because it demonstrates a variety of possible approaches to the topic of religious difference. However, this diversity is not due to intentional selection on my part; rather, it is one of the distinguishing marks of the discourse within the United States.

These scholarly perspectives form the backdrop to my current endeavor to articulate an Islamic theology of religions that is relevant and responsive to the contemporary American context. In critically examining these specific contemporary contributions, I will identify two dominant trends and a shared conception of difference. I will also explore the implications of that conception of difference for understanding the 'self' and the 'other' with reference to the

[6]While not the focus of this study, the comparative examination of writings on Islamic theology of religions from various contexts and in various languages would also be intriguing and would reveal continuities and discontinuities in contextual concerns and methodological approaches.

ideas of two other contemporary scholars who provide examples of an alternative approach and an alternative conception of difference.[7]

2. Prioritization of Sameness

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

The first prevailing trend in contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity is the prioritization of sameness over difference. This trend is apparent, for example, in Asghar Ali Engineer's contribution to Paul Knitter's edited volume *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration.*[8] While Engineer is a public intellectual in the Indian context,[9] his inclusion as one of only two Islamic contributions to Knitter's pivotal volume, pushes him to the center of American scholarly discussions. In his essay and in his other works,[10] Engineer aims to explore Islam's attitude to religious pluralism from a "theological perspective" in order to answer pressing questions about pluralistic civil society.[11] For Engineer, the unique contemporary context of "modernization, liberalization, and globalization" requires a unique Islamic response that provides a solid rationale upon which to affirm universal human rights

[7] The scholars that I discuss in this chapter are all men. Women scholars have not been intentionally excluded; rather they are not represented due to the lack of significant contributions to the field of theology of religions.
[8] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 211-219. Asghar Ali Engineer, a public intellectual and activist in India, is the chairman of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, which he also founded. He is also the general secretary of the Progressive Dawoodi Bohra Movement, an organization aimed at bringing reform to the Dawoodi Bohra branch of Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa Islam that is based in India. The specific mission of this reform movement is to challenge the 'authoritarian' ways of the priesthood (Sayedna and Kothar) not the religious authority of the Daʿi (high priest). Engineer received a traditional religious education from his father, and also obtained a university degree in civil engineering. His scholarship centers on liberation theology, gender issues, and ethnic violence. He has published a number of other books and articles, including *Islam in Post-Modern World: Prospects and Problems* (Gurgaon: Hope India, 2009) and *Rights of Women in Islam* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996).
[9] Sirry, "Compete with One Another," 430.
[10] See Asghar Ali Engineer, *A Rational Approach to Islam* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2001); Asghar Ali Engineer, *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2005); Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam in Contemporary World* (New Delhi: New Dawn, 2007).
[11] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 212.

and freedoms.[12] The pressing connection between theological and practical concerns is here explicit.

Engineer's attempt to formulate such a rationale revolves around four central assertions. The first is that the Qurʾān "not only accepts the legitimacy of religious pluralism but considers it central to its system of beliefs."[13] Citing Qurʾān 5:48,[14] he argues that every religious community has been given its own laws through its own prophets, scriptures and revelations, and that it is in adhering to those laws that each community achieves spiritual growth. The one God did not wish to impose one law on all people, but rather to create multiple diverse communities that would work together to enrich the larger human civilization. Diversity, therefore, is a divinely intended asset that should be used to foster "peace and harmony among all communities."[15] While Engineer proposes this optimistic intention, he notes that more often than not, religious diversity leads to conflict and aggression,[16] especially when individuals or communities attempt to assume the divine prerogative of judging other humans. He does not clarify, however, the precise means by which diversity can be rechanneled into more productive and humane engagements. In reference to Qurʾān 5:48, Engineer also invokes the concept of *wahdat-e-din*, or unity of religion. This concept implies that the *dīn*—defined by Engineer as the "divine origin or essence or truth" —of all revelations and religions is affirmed, despite differences that occur in law,

[12] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 211.
[13] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 212.
[14] "We sent to you (Muhammad) the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about."
وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلاَ تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ
[15] Engineer, *Islam in Contemporary World*, 49; Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 213.
[16] Engineer, *Islam in Contemporary World*, 50, 52.

practice or beliefs.[17] The differences in the latter are secondary and can in no way override the "thoroughly pluralistic approach to the religious 'other'" entailed in the former.[18] Engineer thus acknowledges difference, but prioritizes sameness.

Engineer's second assertion confirms his prioritization of sameness over difference. He maintains that the Qurʾān emphasizes general "good deeds" rather than specific "dogmas."[19] To support this assertion, he, ironically, cites Qurʾān 2:177:

> True goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.[20]

Engineer interpreters this *āya* as a clear illustration of the Qurʾānic de-emphasis of particular beliefs and modes of worship and the Qurʾānic elevation of a general ethical criterion of judgment. Whereas the importance of the ethical criterion cannot be debated, it is difficult to see how an exhortation to believe in God, the Last Day, all the revelations and prophets, to perform prayer (*ṣalāt*), and to pay charity (*zakāt*) is *not* concerned with particular beliefs and practices.

Engineer's third assertion is that the Qurʾān promotes freedom of conscience and freedom from compulsion in respect to religion and belief.[21] He links these freedoms with another prominent Qurʾānic theme, the unity of humanity, as expressed in Qurʾān 2:213.[22]

---

[17] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 213.
[18] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 213.
[19] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 215.
[20] لَّيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَـكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَالْمَلآئِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُواْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاء والضَّرَّاء وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَـئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ
[21] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 215; Engineer, *Islam in Contemporary World*, 49.
[22] "Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it

Although he translates the first phrase of this *āya* imprecisely as "Mankind *is* a single nation," rather than "Mankind *was* a single nation,"[23] Engineer uses it to introduce the principal importance of a universal, shared creation; from the Qurʾānic perspective, all of humankind was created by God. By pairing these two concepts—freedom and unity—Engineer argues that humanity is one, but that God sends different revelations to guide people, thus resulting in the appearance of religious and cultural diversity that should be allowed to exist freely. Humans should not argue over or become envious of each other's particularities, as doing so would permit human difference to "undermine the God-intended unity."[24] It is important to highlight that Engineer obviously acknowledges the reality and value of difference. However, difference for him is something that should be extolled or engaged, never evaluated; evaluation threatens—or complicates—the prioritization of sameness.

The final assertion that Engineer makes is that the Constitution of Medina (*Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna* or *Mithāq al-Madīna*) provides a concrete, historical example of the 'pluralistic vision' of the Qurʾān.[25] In allowing for multiple religious communities to be united under one charter, while maintaining autonomy in all religious affairs and the majority of other matters, Engineer envisions the Constitution as an alternative to other more authoritarian Islamic political models, an alternative that embodies the idea that

> no nation can become a strong, stable, prosperous, and violence-free society unless religious diversity or pluralism is accepted as legitimate, indeed beneficial, ingredient in the organization and functioning of nation and state.[26]

---

was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path."

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِيمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لِمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

[23] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 215.
[24] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 216.
[25] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 216-218.
[26] Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," 217-218.

In drawing on this example, Engineer clearly reveals his primary concern for socio-political harmony. He is rightly concerned with providing an Islamic justification for tolerant interaction and a positive valuation of religious diversity. However, in the process of articulating his justification he ignores—even devalues—other aspects of Islamic belief and practice. While sameness, unity and respect in the face of diversity are core aspects of the Qurʾān, they do not exist in isolation. Engineer does not probe their relationship to more 'pluralism-ambivalent' aspects of the Qurʾān,[27] such as the piercing evaluations the Qurʾān makes of some forms of difference, such as *shirk* (associating partners with God);[28] rather, he employs a selective textual methodology that prioritizes sameness and fails to substantially engage difference. It is important to note that the selective textual methodology (proof-texting) that Engineer employs in order to affirm religious pluralism and stress sameness is the same methodological approach used by other historical and contemporary scholars to arrive at an exclusivist reading of the text that prioritizes difference. In both cases, only those aspects of the Qurʾān that bolster the respective positions—that is, pluralism or exclusivism—are acknowledged, and all other aspects of the text that run counter to or complexify these conclusions are ignored or summarily dismissed.

Abdulaziz Sachedina

A similar concern for socio-political pluralism is articulated by Abdulaziz Sachedina.[29] He too grounds his discussion of pluralism in the Qurʾān, citing 2:213 and deducing three main

[27] Sirry, "'Compete with One Another," 430-431.

[28] See Qurʾān 4:48: "God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will, but anyone who joins partners with God has concocted a tremendous sin."
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَن يَشَاء وَمَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللّهِ فَقَدِ افْتَرَى إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

[29] Abdulaziz Sachedina, of Indian descent and born in Tanzania, is the Frances Myers Ball Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, and his work focuses on

conclusions: the unity of all humanity under one God; the particularities of the religions brought by prophets; and revelation's role in resolving differences among various religious communities.[30] While Sachedina later expounds upon his initial two conclusions, he does not explain exactly how revelation resolves difference. In point of fact, a large portion of his work is devoted to illuminating the various ways in which the particularities of each revelation have led to conflict, exclusivism, and claims of uniqueness.

Sachedina also contends that, at its core, Islam is a religion primarily concerned with the public realm; and that, while the Qurʾān does speak of private faith, the main principle in that arena is individual freedom of conscience and non-intervention. With regard to the public projection of that faith, Sachedina argues that the overriding Qurʾānic principle is coexistence, or the establishment of an "ethical public order" in order to "protect the divinely ordained right of each and every person to determine his or her spiritual destiny without coercion."[31]

While stressing that the main concern of the Qurʾān is ethical, public and aimed at coexistence, Sachedina also offers an insightful account of the interweaving of history and the interpretation of the Qurʾān, which has largely resulted in an exclusivist interpretation of the text that privileges the specifics of Islam over all other religions. Sachedina highlights, in particular, the impact of political and identity dynamics on the hermeneutical process:

Islamic theology, ethics, law, and interfaith relations. His other publications include, *Human Rights and the Conflicts of Culture*, co-authored with D. Little and J. E. Kelsay (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988), *The Just Ruler in Shiite Islam* (New York: Oxford University, 1988), and *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University, 2009). In 1998, Grand Ayatollah Sistani of Iran issued a ruling that advised Muslims not to invite Sachedina to lecture or to seek guidance from him regarding religious matters. This ruling was a response to multiple issues, including Sachedina's writings on religious pluralism, the equality of the Abrahamic faiths, and his interpretation of the term *islām*.

[30] Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 291-309, here 294; Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 23. For a critique of Sachedina's approach, especially his acceptance of liberal democracy and his hermeneutical theory, see Sajjad H. Rizvi, "A Primordial *e pluribus unum*? Exegeses on Q. 2:213 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004): 21-42.

[31] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 295.

> From the standpoint of political organization, exclusivist claims, were effective in providing a legitimating and integrative discourse that could furnish members of the community with a reliable means to assert their collective and political identity.[32]

The hermeneutical inclination towards exclusivism, however, was also impelled by perceived "tensions" or contradictions within the Qurʾān itself, especially between those verses that affirmed the salvific value of other religions and those that seemed to imply that Islam was the only religion capable of leading to salvation.[33] Classical scholars, according to Sachedina, thus concocted a variety of terminological and methodological "stratagems to circumscribe those verses of the Qurʾān which underscored its ecumenical thrust by extending salvific authenticity and adequacy to other monotheistic traditions."[34] These stratagems included selective citation of the Qurʾānic text, *naskh* (abrogation of some Qurʾānic verses by others), supersession (abrogation of previous revelations by Islam), and the soteriological prerequisite of recognizing and adhering to the religion revealed to Muḥammad.[35]

Based on this assessment, Sachedina ponders whether modern scholars should adhere to such exclusivist readings that elevate Islam above all other religions and primarily focus on difference. His response to this question is to reiterate the notions of divine unity, of the unity of humankind, and that God is the source of all revelation, which despite different external forms contains the same message.[36] In addition to this obvious elevation of sameness over the differences, intricacies and conundrums introduced through various revelations, Sachedina also states that there is a historical precedent for avoiding exclusivism. This is the theological position (commonly associated with the Muʿtazilī) that the unaided human intellect, or reason,

[32] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 298.
[33] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 301.
[34] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 299.
[35] Sachedina, *Islamic Roots*, 29-32.
[36] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 300-301.

is "capable of attaining a godly life by choosing from among an array of prophets and their messages."[37] For Sachedina, this approach—in contrast to exclusivism, which requires explicit exposure to Muḥammad's message—is the desirable choice in the modern context. It is also a choice which he sees as centering upon a common human capacity, the universal human *fiṭra* (primordial nature).[38] *Fiṭra*, thus conceived, serves as a sort of moral compass that universally directs all humans in the development of a shared "common moral ground" and a "consensus of ethical values and goals."[39] Responding to the Qurʾānic exhortation to "compete with one another in good works," the development of a moral consensus furthermore transcends mere tolerance, requiring active engagement and understanding despite differences.[40] While Sachedina does note a correlation between the epistemes of reason and revelation,[41] he emphasizes that the innate disposition and faculties were created before the prophets and revelations. In other words, in origin and purpose, the sameness manifest in *fiṭra* takes precedence over and reduces the importance of the external differences introduced by revelation.[42]

MAHMUT AYDIN

The prioritization of sameness over difference is also apparent in the approach of Mahmut Aydin.[43] Aydin highlights the fact that the contemporary context raises new questions

[37] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 303-304.
[38] Sachedina, *Islamic Roots*, 70-73.
[39] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 297. See also Rizvi, "A Primordial *e pluribus unum*?," 28-29.
[40] Sachedina, *Islamic Roots*, 27, 63. See also Sirry, "'Compete with One Another," 431-432. The expression "compete with one another in good works" is taken from Qurʾān 5:48. Refer to footnote 14 in this chapter.
[41] Sachedina, *Islamic Roots*, 85.
[42] Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 305-306; Sachedina, *Islamic Roots*, 27.
[43] Mahmut Aydin is a professor in the Faculty of Theology at University of Ondokuz Mayis in Turkey, where he teaches on history of religious and interreligious dialogue. He earned his Ph.D. from the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at the University of Birmingham. He has published other books and articles,

about Muslim claims of uniqueness and universality.[44] In a world of religious diversity, such claims—specifically those about the singular truth of Islam, the Qurʾān as the absolute Word of God, and Muḥammad as the most superior and final prophet—are increasingly challenged by and increasingly present a challenge to interreligious interaction and dialogue. Aydin, thus, argues that it is imperative to "reconstruct" Muslim theology in light of the contemporary context *and* in dialogue with other religions:

> New developments demand that Muslim theology be reconstructed—not in isolation but in relation with other religions and theological visions—because these new developments make it clear that only an Islam that sees itself in the context of the world religions will make sense in the twenty-first century.[45]

Astutely noting that such a reconstruction will entail reevaluation of a number of interconnected and core Islamic theological categories,[46] he defines the goal as a pluralist Muslim theology of religions that allows for individuals to achieve salvation through their respective religious traditions, not only through explicit adherence to the ways of Muḥammad.

In articulating his pluralist theology, Aydin reexamines the central Qurʾānic concepts of *dīn* and *islām* with explicit reference to historical exegetical debates. He eventually concludes that these terms are synonymous and refer to general belief and faith characterized by submission and self-surrender to God.[47] Aydin draws upon W.C. Smith's distinction between faith and belief in further elucidating his position.[48] Faith is *dīn* and *islām*, that is, that which is

---

including his dissertation *Modern Western Christian Theological Understanding of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002).

[44] Mahmut Aydin, "Religious Pluralism: A Challenge for Muslims—A Theological Evaluation," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2001): 330-352, here 330-334.

[45] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 335.

[46] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 336.

[47] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 340-342.

[48] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 344.

shared across all traditions. Belief is that which is specific to particular traditions.[49] Therefore, the particularities of traditions, the "established structures such as revelation, a sacred book, prophethood, sacred places, the religious community, and law *(sharīʿah)* are not religion *per se* but its concrete forms."[50] Aydin contends that these concrete forms are bound to time and place. In other words, they are wholly dependent upon context. His inclusive reinterpretation of *dīn* and *islām* permits Aydin to argue that all individuals who have general faith—despite all particularities of practice or dogma—are eligible for salvation. It is faith—or sameness—that is tied to salvation, not the context-specific difference.

To bolster this position, Aydin briefly eludes to the universality of revelation, the view that revelations "confirm" rather than "negate" one another, and the view that God is God equally to all of humanity.[51] These are central aspects of Islamic theology, but Aydin does not thoroughly weave them into his overarching pluralist theology, nor does he explore them in any depth. Do revelations really confirm each other when they oblige humans to perform different practices? If God is in the same relationship to all of humankind, what precisely is the relationship? How is it affected by disobedience, disbelief? Aydin's position may be correct, but there are intricacies that would need to be explored and integrated into his overall position. However, since he prioritizes sameness, these rich areas of exploration are simply offered as uninvestigated corroborations of his pluralist stance.

In more recent work, Aydin revisits another historical genre—mystical approaches—and proffers an interpretation of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī as an Islamic exemplar of Paul Knitter's

[49] Aydin states that the specifics—or beliefs, following W.C. Smith—of Islam are defined by the Qurʾānic category of *īmān*. (Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 345-346.) He does not explore this connection in detail and thus presents no account for Qurʾānic references to *īmān* and *muʾmin* among other religious groups.
[50] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 339.
[51] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 343, 347.

"religious-mystical bridge" to affirming pluralism.[52] Aydin presents a number of excerpts from Rūmī's poetry in order to stress the ineffability of the Divine; the partial nature of the experience of that Divine in each religious tradition; the dialectic of inner unity and external diversity; and the notion that multiple paths are equally equipped to achieve the ultimate goal of a movement away from ego-centrism. Although many of these assertions feature prominently in Rūmī's writings, Aydin's effort to emphasize the unity, shared origin/goal and effectiveness of every religion oversimplifies Rūmī's understanding of the complex relationship between unity and diversity. This simplification is evident in the parallel Aydin draws between John Hick's employment of the Kantian distinction between noumenon and phenomena, and Rūmī's distinction between meaning and forms.[53] Both Kant and Rūmī do aim to account simultaneously for the existence of One Real/God and for the multiplicity of religions. Aydin, however, overlooks a vital dissimilarity between the two. For Hick, the phenomena are human projections or human responses defined in light of "limited cultural and psychological categories."[54] For Rūmī, in contrast, the multiplicity of forms is the divinely-intended result of divine self-disclosure; it is a result of the manifestation of divine attributes and names in the world. Both models depict the Real/God as greater than any one religion (phenomenon or form), but for Rūmī there is an authentic connection between the two. The forms, although delimited, are real *wujūd*, rather than human projections.[55]

Oversimplification is also apparent in the fact that Aydin does not clearly define what counts in Rūmī's mind as an acceptable religion. Aydin appears to argue for the acceptability

[52] Mahmut Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist: Jalaluddin Rumi," in Knitter, *Myth*, 220-236.
[53] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 222-223. See also John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004).
[54] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 222.
[55] Roger Boase makes a similar point in distinguishing traditionalists from Hick. See Roger Boase, "Ecumenical Islam: A Muslim Response to Religious Pluralism," in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Surrey: Ashgate, 2005), 247-266, here 252.

and salvific efficacy of all religions, but he quotes Rūmī as saying, "Is not the origin of the law or revelation the same?"[56] This refers back to what is very clear in the preceding examination of Rūmī, that is, his insistence upon the necessity of following the teachings and practices of revealed religion in general and preferably the teachings and practices of Muḥammad. While a case could be made that Rūmī has a more universal definition of what religions are the products of divine revelation through prophets, Aydin does not make such an argument. On the other hand, Aydin does not wish to affirm every manifestation of religion; there is corruption and contamination. Since he cannot distinguish between distorted and undistorted revelation based upon any prioritization of external forms, like Hick, he is forced to avoid relativism through the invocation of an amorphous ethical criterion, "ethical fruits."[57]

Furthermore, Aydin does not address the distinction Rūmī draws between the ontological and deontological commands of God, that is, the distinction between what God wills and what God approves or commands.[58] Aydin implicitly favors the ontological command when he states that that "the reality of religious diversity was rooted in the reality of God."[59] Based on this in isolation, he is able to interpret Rūmī's poetry as an unequivocal assertion of the shared origin and goal, of the equal validity and of the equal effectiveness of all religious paths, despite their differences.[60] As in his earlier work, Aydin acknowledges the existence of difference, but prioritizes sameness: the "lamps are different but the Light is the same," and religions are "different vehicles" headed in the "same direction."[61] He is able to stress the

[56] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 232.
[57] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 233. Aydin in many ways mimics the basic structure of Hick's argumentation.
[58] This distinction is discussed in Chapter Two in greater detail.
[59] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 228.
[60] It is worth noting that in the American context, where Rūmī is widely popular, this is the general interpretation of Rūmī's writings. When his poetry is presented without reference to mystical theories and worldviews within the Islamic context, this is an understandable—albeit simplified—interpretation.
[61] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 223, 225.

general message rather than the "established system" of particular religions.[62] However, the ontological command, which arises from the very nature of God, is only one aspect of Rūmī's complex position on the relationship between oneness and multiplicity. The other component is the deontological command, whereby God approves of or wills human beings to follow only certain paths. Though Rūmī definitely emphasizes sameness and oneness, difference—in the form of the established systems of revealed religions—is never negated and, in fact, is the precise means by which one comes to a full appreciation of sameness. The full appreciation of sameness is thus the end product of following a distinctive path.[63]

What then is the role of difference according to Aydin? It is perhaps indicative of his overall emphasis on sameness that Aydin's most extensive discussion of difference comes in a footnote. In it, he states that difference in general is divinely intended so that humans can strive to know one another and compete with each other in good deeds.[64] Difference "affirmed by both the Qurʾan and Rumi, in no way is meant to lead to either relativism or chaos. It is, rather, a diversity grounded in, and productive of, unity."[65] He also characterizes difference as a 'test' that humans must accept. Despite the divine intention, this test, when manifest in various external forms, is more frequently than not the source of discord among humanity. In line with this observation, Aydin himself refers to these forms as "combustible materials" and quotes Rūmī as referring to them as "obstacles" and "roadblocks" that must be "looked

[62] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 232.
[63] Interestingly, Aydin concludes his examination by asking whether Rūmī's example "suggests that the deeper the holiness of a Muslim, the greater the likelihood that that Muslim will be a pluralist." (Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 236.) This question—unintentionally perhaps—summarizes precisely what Aydin loses sight of in prioritizing sameness to the degree that he does: that the most complete understanding of sameness, according to Rūmī, is achieved through adherence to a specific manifestation of formal difference.
[64] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 228, footnote 24.
[65] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 232.

beyond."[66] In Aydin's estimation, an emphasis on particularities, while potentially beneficial in a utopian scenario, in the real world leads to conflict.

3. Simultaneous Affirmation of Sameness and Difference

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

An apparently similar approach to that of Aydin is found in the writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.[67] Approaching the topic from the perspectives both of the so-called "Perennial Philosophy" and of Sufism, Nasr reiterates many of the central contentions of Aydin's mystical interpretation, including the notions of inner unity, external diversity, and divine ineffability. Beyond these similarities, however, Nasr's approach diverges significantly from Aydin's and thus reveals the second prominent trend in contemporary Islamic discourse on religious pluralism: the attempt to affirm and value both sameness and difference at the same time.

Nasr's approach is grounded in a particular understanding of the modern context in juxtaposition with the traditional context.[68] Traditional civilizations, according to Nasr, were homogeneous wholes structured in every arena by principles of transcendent origin. This traditional context is the only normal, natural and meaningful context for humans. Nasr asserts that man "has been created to live in a homogeneous religious tradition, one in which

[66] Aydin, "A Muslim Pluralist," 232.
[67] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 59-81. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian philosopher, is currently University Professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University, and previously taught at Harvard University, Tehran University, Arya Mehr University (Sharif University), University of Edinburgh, and Temple University. Nasr was also the president of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, the first academic institution to be founded upon the principles of philosophical Traditionalism, and he was the first Muslim to give the Gifford Lectures ("Knowledge and the Sacred," 1980-1981). His research and writing focus on a wide variety of subjects, including Perennial Philosophy, Sufism, comparative religion, and metaphysics. He has authored a multitude of books and articles, including *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Practice of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HaperOne, 2007), *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York: HaperOne, 2002), and *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State university of New York, 1989).
[68] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," in Umar, *The Religious Other*, 83-120, here 84-87.

the values of his religion are for him *the* values, absolute and binding."[69] In such a context, other religions were "alien worlds" that did not provoke concern; there was no need to "take cognizance of the metaphysical significance of other traditions."[70] Nasr, however, acknowledges that the homogeneity of the traditional context has been "broken" in the majority of the modern world, and hence depicts modern humanity as faced with "abnormal conditions" and the unique dilemma of wanting to simultaneously maintain faith in one's own religion while accepting the validity of others'.[71] The dual affronts of secular philosophies and contact with other traditions have made the existence of other religions into an urgent metaphysical and theological concern.

Nasr promotes Perennial Philosophy (the philosophical perspective that all religious truth derives from a single divine reality) and Sufism as the only effective ways to grapple with this modern concern. These approaches—which share similarities—are the "key" because they avoid the common pitfalls of other modern attempts to comprehend religious diversity.[72] Some such pitfalls include historicism, phenomenology, lowest-common denominator ecumenism, and relativism.[73] Nasr argues that each of these fails to engage in serious discussion of metaphysical and theological topics. While such topics may not readily lend themselves to resolution or reconciliation, they must be studied, elaborated and better understood:

> It is too late for diplomatic platitudes and the kind of relativization which in the name of ecumenical understanding belittles issues of major theological concern, creating so-called human accord at the expense of truncating, reducing, or distorting the Divine Message.[74]

---

[69] Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 86.
[70] Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 85.
[71] Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 86; Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Kent, UK: Japan Society Publications, 1994), 116-117.
[72] Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 111-112; Aslan, *Religious Pluralism,* 126-127.
[73] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 66-68.
[74] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Comments on a Few Theological Issues in the Islamic-Christian Dialogue," in Haddad and Ḥaddād, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, 457-465, here 457. In this piece—which is written specifically about

Nasr is thus obviously concerned with avoiding an approach that depicts all religions as the same through neglect of their distinct—and potentially conflicting—particularities.

How does Perennial Philosophy depict religious diversity? Nasr states that the foundational contention is the existence of a single ineffable divine reality that is the "source of the teachings of each authentic faith."[75] He utilizes the analogy of a spring that gushes forth water in order to depict the manner in which the one Divine manifests in the world. The spring sends many cascades of water that descend through various levels of reality, passing over and through various terrains. No cascades are the same, although some are similar and some come into contact. However, "[o]nly at the Spring Itself are all the cascades one and nowhere else should complete unity be sought among them."[76] There exists a transcendent unity in that the source of all revelations is the same, but in the world religions are characterized by various degrees and forms of difference.

Similar to other scholars writing from a mystical perspective, Nasr explains the simultaneous existence of unity and diversity—or sameness and difference—by drawing a distinction between the esoteric and exoteric—the meaning (*maʿnā*) and the form (*sūra*). While the two are distinct, they are nonetheless integrally connected. He does not, therefore, permit the reduction or devaluation of the exoteric forms of religions. The forms, which for Nasr include particular dogmas, rites, and law, are both "necessary" and "sacrosanct;" they are the "gateways" to the esoteric.[77] According to Nasr, traditional esotericism, unlike modern Western ecumenism, "emphasizes the basic distinction between transcending forms from

---

Christianity but nonetheless largely relevant to other religions—he identifies seven central issues that need to be explored: the way in which God manifests God's self (457); Islam's claims to finality of prophethood (459); the meaning and status of sacred scripture (460); sacred language (462); sacred law (462); the life of Christ (463); and modernism (465).

[75] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 64.

[76] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 65.

[77] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 71.

above and rejecting forms by falling below them, thereby forfeiting the very possibility of ever reaching the world of the Formless."[78] In other words, one can only reach the world of the Formless, or gain an understanding of the inner meaning, through the forms.[79] Nasr, therefore, diverges from Aydin in stressing the importance of both the *message* and the *system*, as well as in explicitly rejecting the severing of noumenon and phenomena characteristic of Immanuel Kant and John Hick.[80]

In order to maintain the simultaneous value of both sameness and difference, Nasr asserts that both the meaning and the forms are absolute: the former as the Absolute in Itself and the latter as what Frithjof Schuon calls "the relatively absolute."[81] Nasr clarifies this through the analogy of suns and their solar systems, in which each manifestation of the Divine Logos represents the sun in a planetary system.[82] Echoing other descriptions of a traditional context, he states that every sun is actually one star among many, but to those in the planetary system it is the only sun and seems to be of a completely different order from the many other stars. Nasr also reiterates in this context that the formal expressions of the religious systems derive relatively absolute status from the manifestation of the Logos. More importantly, he argues that in such a model,

> the fact that these elements (forms) within a particular religious universe might differ from or even contradict elements belonging to another universe does not

[78] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 71. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam's Attitude Towards Other Religions in History," in Umar, *The Religious Other*, 121-134, here 125.
[79] According to Nasr, only very few people, though, ever gain real knowledge of the Formless: "Not everyone may be able to see the camel on the top of the minaret, much less to distinguish the hair in its mouth. But those who are possessed of such a vision are bound by duty to explain to others to the greatest extent possible what they have seen." (Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 111.) Despite the obligation to disseminate insight, this hints at a structure of elitism that places practical limitations on Nasr's approach. See also Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 163, 169; Rizvi, "A Primordial *e pluribus unum*?," 34.
[80] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 67.
[81] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 74; Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 117-118.
[82] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 74-75.

> prove their falsity or destroy their absoluteness within the universe to which they belong.[83]

Nasr's analogy is effective in validating the integrity of particular religious universes and in suggesting a model for understanding how the existence of other particular religious universes does not falsify one's own universe. This analogy, however, also vividly highlights one of the chief limitations of Nasr's approach. He assigns value to both sameness and difference, but he does not effectively address the topic of interaction or conflict between religions. While he does introduce the notion of "crossing religious frontiers,"[84] he describes this as simply recognizing and appreciating the aforementioned reality. Thus, the analogy of relatively absolute religious universes fails to address the fact that contemporary religious universes do not exist in isolation, nor are they typically homogeneous wholes. Religious universes collide, cross orbits, have internal systematic tensions, and are frequently not defined by clear boundaries. This is the very reality of the modern context as Nasr describes it. It is striking therefore that his method of understanding that new—albeit in Nasr's estimation "abnormal"—context is to superimpose the traditional model upon it, in order to reassure people confused by the discovery of relativity that everyone's absolutes are still in place.[85]

Reza Shah-Kazemi

Reza Shah-Kazemi[86] also utilizes the mystical approach as the basis of his model of the relationship between Islam and other religions. Building upon Nasr's approach and coupling it

[83] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 75.
[84] Nasr, "Religion and Religions," 75. Elsewhere when he addresses examples of such 'crossing,' specifically missionary activity and Islamic fundamentalism, he indicates that such interactions have bred hostility and created tension. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam's Attitude Towards Other Religions in History," 128-133.
[85] Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 86.
[86] Reza Shah-Kazemi, the founding editor of the *Islamic World Report*, is a research fellow in the Department of Academic Research and Publications at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. He earned his Ph.D. in comparative religion from the University of Kent, and his work focuses on mysticism, Islam, Sufism, and Shīʿism. His other publications

with a Sufi hermeneutic developed from Ibn al-ʿArabī,[87] he reasserts the transcendent unity of all religion, the necessity of the One manifesting in the many, and the notion of Divine self-disclosure through created diversity. These are familiar themes at this point in this study, although Shah-Kazemi is eloquent in expressing and synthesizing them.

One novel aspect of Shah-Kazemi's approach is his introduction of the category of universalism in response to what he sees as shortcomings of the general classifications of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism common to Christian theology of religions.[88] Like pluralism, universalism recognizes diverse religious traditions as salvifically effective. Unlike pluralism, however, it sees those various paths as divinely ordained and authored—rather than humanly constructed—and it refuses to deny the uniqueness of each religion in order to subsume them under one 'global theology.' With respect to inclusivism, universalism shares the assertion of a single religious essence, but again insists that "the very otherness of the other is rigorously maintained and respected, rather than being domesticated and appropriated as part of one's formal religion."[89] Finally, although universalism does not deny the validity of other religions, it does echo the exclusivist view that one's religion is normative and binding. Shah-Kazemi's universalism, therefore, serves as a reiteration of Nasr's contention that the forms of religions are important and integrally tied to the meaning. If the various paths or forms are divinely ordained and intended, they cannot be abolished, reduced or ignored.[90] Furthermore, when Shah-Kazemi asserts that difference is simultaneously upheld and transcended, he echoes Nasr's distinction between transcending forms from above rather

include *Paths of Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart on Transcendent Spiritual Realization* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 2006) and *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Ali* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

[87] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other*, xvii-xviii, 59-73.

[88] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* xxiv-xxvi.

[89] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* xxv.

[90] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* 162.

than rejecting them from below, that is, negating the importance of forms. For both Nasr and Shah-Kazemi, differences in formal religious expressions must be upheld and followed in this world; they are transcended only on the "supra-phenomenal plane of the divine Principle itself."[91]

Another concern for Shah-Kazemi is the development of a model for interreligious dialogue that is appealing to—and open to—other religions as well to more exclusivist elements within the Muslim community. Citing Qurʾān 16:125,[92] he formulates his conception of dialogue as the "most beautiful discourse," built upon the twin principles of the universality of revelation and the connection of that revelation to the "unique Absolute."[93] While, in the context of dialogue, he does state that what is shared between all believers (defined as those who believe in the absolute and revelation) is "of infinitely greater value than that which differentiates them," he simultaneously fends off an isolated emphasis on sameness by asserting that unity does not entail uniformity and that there can be "no question of bland leveling out of formal differences."[94]

Shah-Kazemi's interest in accounting equally for both sameness and difference is again obvious in his simultaneous affirmation of Islam as quintessential, universal submission and Islam as an institutional religion that possesses normativity, completeness, and finality.[95] If fact, he states that one of the main goals of his approach is to reconcile these "apparently contradictory positions."[96] He acknowledges that the insistence on the normativity of institutional Islam—an insistence upheld by the historical scholars cited by Shah-Kazemi—

[91] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* xxv.
[92] "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided."
ادْعُ إِلِى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُم بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ
[93] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* 266, 275.
[94] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* 266, 276.
[95] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* 143, 238-244.
[96] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* xxvi.

could lead to "arrogance and chauvinism," but contends that the universal and institutional can be spiritually assimilated through his metaphysical Sufi universalism.[97] Since Shah-Kazemi is concerned with practical interaction—primarily in the form of inclusive dialogue—he is unable to affirm both sameness and difference by isolating the two as in Nasr. Rather, he affirms both by appealing to a hierarchy of evaluation between particular traditions, with Islam—more precisely Sufism—being the normative apex.

MUHAMMAD LEGENHAUSEN

The concern for reduction of difference—central to this second trend—assumes its most explicit expression in the work of Muhammad Legenhausen.[98] Legenhausen criticizes the views of John Hick and other scholars, whom he describes as advocating a "reductive pluralism" that affirms religious diversity based upon a lowest-common-denominator conception of sameness.[99] This type of pluralism, according to Legenhausen, emphasizes private faith over the public enactment of religion, and thus neglects the "practical dimensions" of religions:

> Religions have important practical dimensions, not only because of the moral codes they promote, but also because of their ritual and aesthetic dimensions. Even if the doctrinal conflict among religions could be reconciled along the lines suggested by Hick, the practical conflicts would remain.[100]

[97] Shah-Kazemi, *The Other,* 244, xxii.
[98] Muhammad Legenhausen, an American philosopher, received his Ph.D. from Rice University and currently teaches at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Iran. He is also a founding member of the advisory board of the Shī'ite Studies Center in Qom, and serves on the scientific board of the Human Rights Center of Mofid University, Qom. Previously, Legenhausen taught philosophy of religion, ethics and epistemology at the Islamic Iranian Academy of Philosophy. In addition to his own works, he has translated a number of books into Persian and Arabic.
[99] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 65. For a more extensive account of his objections to the approach of John Hick, see Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, 31-88. In the same volume, he also proffers a critique of interpretations (similar to that of Aydin) that describe Sufism and mysticism as unequivocally affirming religious pluralism. (Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, 107-115.)
[100] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 58.

While reductive pluralists emphasize freedom of religion, Legenhausen states that their freedom relates only to doctrine or beliefs not "rituals, ethical ideals, and laws."[101] Furthermore, even on the doctrinal side, it downplays differences, resulting in the reduction of religious imperative to a question of preference or personal taste. This form of pluralism, according to Legenhausen, is therefore unsuitable for Islamic discussions because of the emphasis Islam places on social and legalist piety and absolute monotheism.[102]

Laying the foundation for his articulation of a non-reductive alternative, Legenhausen defines pluralism as "a doctrine according to which *some sort* of favorable attribution is ascribed to a plurality of religions."[103] He then identifies a "plurality of pluralisms," explicating an array of different sorts and scopes.[104] The kinds of religious pluralism he outlines include soteriological (pertaining to salvation), normative (pertaining to treatment of adherents of other religions), epistemological (pertaining to the logical justification of beliefs), alethic (pertaining to the truth of beliefs), ethical (pertaining to moral obligations and systems), deontological (pertaining to religious obligations based on God's command), and hermetic (pertaining to esoteric unity).

In terms of scope, Legenhausen distinguishes between equality pluralism and degree pluralism. The former implies that the favorable attribution is present equally in all religions, while the latter implies that the positive attribution is present in different religions to different degrees. In exposing the complexity of religious pluralism, he intends not only to extend his critique of reductive pluralism, but also to introduce the possibility that different sorts of pluralism may be the central focus in theologies of religions formulated within

[101] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 60.
[102] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 63-64; Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, 104.
[103] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 52. Italics mine.
[104] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 51-56.

different religious traditions. This reiterates his critique of the essentially Christian development of theology of religions, which has primarily focused upon the topic of salvation.[105] Thus, for Legenhausen, reduction of difference is not only a concern with regard to the assessment of religions, but also with regard to the complexity of the field itself.

The explication of a plurality of pluralisms also forms the basis of his distinction between the concepts of "correct religion" and "salvation."[106] Whereas in other traditions the two are directly linked, Legenhausen draws a division between them, contending that correct religion comprises those beliefs and actions that are "divinely ordained" in the present era, and that salvation is ultimately contingent upon God's Mercy rather than belief or works alone. Legenhausen is not primarily interested in salvation, as in many ways all humans stand in the same situation of need with respect to God's Mercy. Rather, he is concerned with the question of correct religion, that is, with the question of God's deontological command in relationship to various religions. Legenhausen contends that Islam—the religion revealed to Muḥammad—is the only "correct religion." Other religions and revelations are neither wholly "incorrect" nor completely devoid of guidance. However, appealing to the ideas of supersession, superiority and perfection, he argues that Islam is the only divinely-ordained religion in contemporary times.[107] Conceding that this position may sound exclusivist, he describes it as a degree pluralism that acknowledges degrees of truth in other religions and the possibility of religious others achieving salvation.[108] In his approach, Legenhausen—similar to Shah-Kazemi—accommodates both sameness and difference by invoking rigid hierarchical

[105] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 56; Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, 95.
[106] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 65.
[107] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 66-67.
[108] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 70.

evaluation: other religions have some truth and ability to guide, but Islam is comprehensive and unsurpassed.

4. Prioritization of Difference

As explicated, there are two dominant trends within the contemporary Islamic discourse: the prioritization of sameness and the attempt to simultaneously affirm both sameness and difference. However, there is another possible approach: the prioritization of difference. The prioritization of difference is the inverse of the prioritization of sameness. While sameness may be acknowledged, it is treated as negligible. Difference and the divisions between religions, in contrast, are magnified.

There are three important observations that must be made regarding this position. First, the majority of contemporary scholars who engage in the discourse of theology of religions—that is, those scholars I am focusing on in this study—do not voice this view. Second, the absence of this trend—notable in and of itself—is related to the grappling with the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other; most contemporary scholars acknowledge at least a degree of irreducible sameness, and as such they must contend with this particular type of 'other.' Third, while this perspective is not common within the discourse of theology of religions, it is common within more general contemporary Islamic discussions. Moreover, when voiced, it is voiced as a verbatim reiteration of the historical discourse, drawing upon the ideas and writings of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr. This is of great significance because it indicates a gulf between the discourse I am examining and more general discussions. This gulf is perpetuated in part by the fact that the writings of historical scholars who prioritize

difference are widely available. Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr*, for example, is translated into more languages than any other *tafsīr*, and it is also widely available on the internet.

5. Proximity and Otherness: The Prevailing Conception of Difference and Beyond

While the preceding approaches illuminate various theological concerns and offer a plethora of valuable insights, they all revolve around one pivotal concern: the identification and evaluation of difference. Perhaps more significantly, these scholarly approaches demonstrate a shared conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries.

In the first trend—the prioritization of sameness—such boundaries are seen as impediments to the ultimate goal of tolerant interaction; boundaries and difference create conflict. Thus difference is devalued and downplayed, while sameness is emphasized. Deeds are stressed over dogmas (Engineer), ethical *fiṭra* over revelation (Sachedina), and the message/meaning over the system/form (Aydin). In the second trend—the attempt to simultaneously affirm sameness and difference—divisions and boundaries are upheld in an effort to maintain the value and divine intentionality of difference. Religions are therefore depicted as bounded wholes that either do not—or ideally would not—interact at all (Nasr) or are related only through some sort of evaluative hierarchy (Shah-Kazemi and Legenhausen). Separation and hierarchical evaluation maintain boundaries and difference, and although sameness is acknowledged it is not permitted to eradicate or blur such boundaries. Nasr, for example, envisions all religions as being connected to the Absolute in Itself, but religions ideally and under normal conditions remain discrete universes or frontiers. Likewise in Legenhausen, divine revelation is acknowledged in respect to other religions, but divine

revelation also creates bounded communities that are deontologically commanded in successive and linear order without any overlap. The prioritization of difference—although not a perspective asserted by any of the scholars I have explored—is an extreme example of this particular conception of the difference. As was seen in the discussions of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr in Chapter Two, there is a fixation on defining and enforcing distinct and fixed boundaries between various segments of humanity.

To gain a better understanding of the nuances and implications of this particular conception of difference, it is helpful to briefly revisit Boyarin. In addition to explicating the deliberateness of othering and the enforcement of boundaries demarcating difference, he also describes the end product of such processes. The result of "fetishizing borders and boundaries"[109] is a depiction of religions as "separate, hermetically sealed compartments."[110] Such rigid and static compartments do serve a cognitive function, but they are also a gross simplification of religious identity and interaction. They present religions fully purged of all fuzziness, complexity, and hybridity.

The theories of Jonathan Z. Smith also help to clarify the implications of the shared conception of difference in contemporary Islamic discourse. Smith intricately probes the construction of the 'other,' describing the most basic view of the 'other' as the binary opposition WE/THEY, or IN/OUT.[111] Similarly to Boyarin, Smith states that this stark dualism is characterized by a preoccupation with clearly defined, impenetrable boundaries, limits, thresholds, and pollution. As such, the primary mode of interaction depicted by this binary opposition is a dual process of containment, that is, keeping in and keeping out. The threshold

[109] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xv.
[110] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 14, citing David Chidester. See also David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 4.
[111] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 27, 230.

or boundary therefore assumes great prominence as the symbol and marker of the division between insiders and outsiders.[112]

Smith, however, contends that othering is much more complex than this basic and clearly defined binary opposition. Othering actually involves four possible alternative stances to the 'other': like us, not like us, too much like us, and we are not like them. The deepest intellectual issues surround the third stance (too much like us), which he terms the proximate other in distinction from the distant other.[113] Distant others (not like us) are so clearly distinguished that they are "insignificant" and "voiceless." Since they are easily defined and contained, they require no exegetical effort. The proximate other, however, is much more complex and amorphous; it is the 'other' who claims to be 'you,' the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other. As such, the proximate other presents a direct and perpetual challenge to the worldview and self-identity of the initial group, forcing ongoing modification, reconsideration, and redrawing of boundaries.[114] For Smith, therefore, the 'other', the different, is not that which is wholly distinct or discretely bounded. Difference—at least meaningful difference—is always relational, dynamic, and provocative.[115]

Neither trend in contemporary Islamic discourse effectively accounts for the complexity of this proximate other. The trend of prioritizing sameness partially addresses proximity—as defined by Smith—but neglects otherness by devaluing difference. The attempt to affirm both sameness and difference, conversely, neglects the full complexity of proximity by establishing clearly defined and distinct (even when related) religious wholes. There are, however, two other contemporary scholars—Farid Esack and Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī—who begin to

[112] Smith, *Relating Religion*, 231.
[113] Smith, *Relating Religion*, 245. These terms could connote spatial relationships, but Smith utilizes them primarily in a cognitive or conceptual manner.
[114] Smith, *Relating Religion*, 246.
[115] Smith, *Relating Religion*, 242.

indicate alternatives to the dominant trends with their shared conception of difference, and thus better account for the proximate religious other.

Farid Esack[116] explicitly addresses the topic of identity and argues that the majority of interreligious thought and interaction is premised upon the notion of a stable self or stable community that adheres to a "package of essential and unchanging values, principles and beliefs which stand in contrast with the other equally stable, even if invariably 'lesser', other."[117] Similar to Boyarin, Esack maintains that this depiction—or distortion—masks that fact that identity is multiple and continually undergoing transformation.[118] Esack, moreover, argues that the "insistence on viewing identity as stable, static, or monolithic" is reflective of an insecurity or fear about the fuzziness that may emerge if identity of 'self' and 'other' were truly examined.[119] Despite the potential risks, Esack argues that it is essential to carry out such an examination:

> There is, however, only one way to live; through discovering what the self and other and their ever changing nature are really about, to understand how much of the other is really reflected in us and to find out what it is that we have in common in the struggle to a world of justice and dignity for all the inhabitants of the earth. To do so requires transcending theological categories of self and other that were shaped in and intended for another era and context.[120]

---

[116] Farid Esack, a South African scholar and activist, is a professor in the Study of Islam at the University of Johannesburg. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Birmingham, and completed *Darsi Nizami* (a traditional Islamic Studies program) in Pakistan. His scholarship and activism focus on inter-faith relations, gender issues, hermeneutics, liberation theology, and Islam and AIDS. Esack was the National Commissioner on Gender Equality (appointed by Nelson Mandela) and played a prominent role in the United Democratic Front, the Call of Islam, the Organisation of People Against Sexism, and the World Conference on Religion & Peace. He is also a founding member and the deputy chairperson of Positive Muslims, an organization dedicated to helping HIV-positive Muslims in Africa. Among his many other publications are *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), *The Qurʾān: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), and *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

[117] Farid Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*," in *Proselytization and Communal Self-Determination in Africa*, ed. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naʾim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 51-76, here 53.

[118] Farid Esack, "Religio-Cultural Diversity: For What and with Whom? Muslim Reflections from a Postapartheid South Africa in the Throes of Globalization," in *Cultural Diversity and Islam*, ed. Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 165-185, here 173.

[119] Esack, "Religio-Cultural Diversity," 171.

[120] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"60.

According to Esack, clinging to theological categories that were developed in another era, in another context, leads to injustice.[121] He therefore seeks to transcend those categories through critical and selective reinterpretation and recontextualization of the Qurʾānic categories related to 'self' and 'other.'[122]

Working from within his specific context—apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa—and utilizing a set of intertwined and dialectically related hermeneutical keys,[123] Esack articulates a Qurʾānic theology of liberation grounded in an analysis of the Qurʾānic usage of categories, such as *īmān*, *islām*, *kufr*, *ahl al-kitāb*, and *mushrikūn*. His analysis uncovers an interpretative trend towards reification; terms that appear as dynamic qualities in the Qurʾānic text have been interpreted as "entrenched" labels that designate particular groups.[124] Rather than avoid such terms due to traditional and exclusivist interpretations, Esack aims to redefine them. His examination of the Qurʾān, however, is not aimed at introducing a new set of static delineations. On the whole, his reinterpretation is more concerned with demonstrating the nuances, dynamism, and exceptions related to such categories. For instance, he emphasizes the degrees and fluctuation of *īmān;*[125] the active and conscious nature of *kufr;*[126] and the exceptions related to negative evaluations of the *mushrikūn*.[127] As these examples indicate, rather than eliminating fuzziness and complexity, Esack is illuminating it and demonstrating that neat divisions are more problematic than most scholars admit.[128] The illumination of complexity, however, is not simply a post-modern indulgence. It is not, as some critics have

[121] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"61.
[122] Farid Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 50.
[123] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 85. For an extensive description of the hermeneutical keys, see 87-110.
[124] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 115.
[125] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 117.
[126] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 136.
[127] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"63.
[128] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"62. In fact, many critiques of Esack have centered on his illumination of complexity.

contended, a dissolution of all distinction between the 'self' and 'other;'[129] rather, it is an assertion that such distinction is dynamic, in flux, and does not correspond to static designations of socio-religious communities. His illumination of complexity also is designed to facilitate his ultimate goal of advocating interaction, engagement, and practical cooperation across religious groups, based upon defined principles, and in the quest to fulfill the specific objectives of human liberation and justice.[130]

Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī,[131] unlike Esack, does not explicitly address identity from a theoretical perspective. In his description of the relationship between Islam and other religions, however, he outlines a multifaceted and integrated approach that accommodates sameness and difference without resorting to isolation or to the hierarchical evaluation of static, bounded categories. Al-Fārūqī begins his approach with an examination of the worldview inherent in the concept of *tawḥīd* (divine unicity). Based on this examination, he outlines five principles: that God and creation are utterly and absolutely distinct; that despite this distinction they are related and relevant to each other; that creation is teleological; that humankind is endowed with the natural capacities necessary to fulfill the divinely-intended purpose; that creation is malleable in order to permit humankind to realize the will of God; and that due to humanity's capacity and creation's malleability, humankind stands in a position of moral responsibility

[129] Rizvi, "A Primordial *e pluribus unum*?," 31. Rizvi also critiques Esack for rendering the text so 'open' that it becomes 'meaningless.' (Rizvi, "A Primordial *e pluribus unum*?," 32.)
[130] Farid Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 180; Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*," 75.
[131] Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī, born in Palestine, received his Ph.D. from Indiana University and also studied at al-Azhar University in Egypt. He taught Islam and comparative religion at various universities, including McGill, Cairo, al-Azhar, and Syracuse. At the time of his murder in 1986, he was a professor in the Department of Religion at Temple University. Al-Fārūqī founded many university Islamic Studies programs and the Islamic Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion. He—along with Sheikh Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Dr. Abdul Hamid Sulayman—also founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought, which promotes the Islamization of knowledge project. Among his many other works are *Christian Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas* (Montreal: McGill University, 1968) and *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

and accountability to God.[132] These principles, according to al-Fārūqī, are the common core of all revelations sent from God and delivered by prophets. Significantly, they are also "built by God in the very fabric of human nature, constituting the unerring natural religion or natural conscience upon which human acquired knowledge rests."[133] Al-Fārūqī, thus, presents a scenario in which knowledge of *tawḥīd* is accessible via two avenues: divine revelation and human nature (human reason).[134]

Al-Fārūqī then explicates the implications of these principles in terms of a theory of God, a theory of revelation, a theory of humankind, a theory of works and moral action, and a theory of society.[135] Before even entering into the details of these theories, the sheer comprehensiveness of his approach is indicative of the fact that he is not aiming to reduce complexity or create neat compartments of difference. In respect to God, al-Fārūqī stresses that every member of humanity is God's creature and vicegerent, and that God did not "give any special status to any person or group."[136] All of humanity stands in the same relationship to God, with the same responsibilities and the same accountability. This illustrates a unique aspect of al-Fārūqī's approach. He is not simply presenting a more egalitarian model that allows the 'other' to be valued; rather, he is presenting an approach that both values the 'other' and holds the other accountable to God.[137]

With revelation, al-Fārūqī contends that the divine will is knowable through a variety of sources, including revelation, science, and the *sensus numinis* instilled in human nature (*fiṭra*). Revelation has been given to all people—it is universal—and the other capacities have

[132] Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī, *al Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992), 9-15; Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths* (Leicester, UK and Herndon, VA: The Islamic Foundation and International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998), 131-133.
[133] al-Fārūqī, *al Tawḥīd*, 14-15.
[134] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 132.
[135] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 133-145.
[136] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 134.
[137] Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī, "The Essence of Religious Experience in Islam," *Numen* 20, no. 3 (1973): 186-201, here 198.

been instilled in all people through creation. The only distinction he draws between these sources is that revelation provides certainty, whereas the other sources require humans to utilize and develop their innate faculties.[138] He also states that while all of humankind has been "the object and subject of revelation," revelation can be lost, changed or confused. This, however, does not render a person incapable of knowing the divine will, nor does it sever the relationship with God.[139]

His theory of humankind centers on the depiction of humanity as capable, innocent, and endowed with "innate perfections."[140] Al-Fārūqī contends that, based upon human nature (*fiṭra*), every person—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—possesses *dīn al-fiṭra* (natural religion), and through this humans naturally arrive at a recognition of the principles of *tawḥīd*. While all historical religious traditions emerge out of *dīn al-fiṭra*, *dīn al-fiṭra* must be perpetually distinguished from them all.[141] This is vital for al-Fārūqī because *dīn al-fiṭra* becomes a sort of measuring rod against which all historical traditions can be assessed and creatively reformed. Religions are thus not compared to Islam, but all religions—including Islam—are to be compared to *dīn al-fiṭra*.[142]

In terms of accountability to God, al-Fārūqī contends that good works are the most vital component, and that the "lowest premium" is placed on self-identification with a particular religion. This follows necessarily from his emphasis on *dīn al-fiṭra*. Using the example of the *ḥanīf*—which he defines as a person who has *dīn al-fiṭra* without belonging to a particular religion—he argues that the explicit profession of faith is secondary. In fact, he contends that

[138] al-Fārūqī, "The Essence,"197.
[139] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 135.
[140] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 137-138.
[141] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 139.
[142] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 140.

faith is just another "good work."[143] There is value in it, but it is not a prerequisite for good works to be accepted by God. Finally, in relation to society, al-Fārūqī urges Muslims to mimic God's relationship with all of humanity, envisioning all others both as objects of concern and as moral subjects actively involved in fulfilling the divine will.[144] Through these theories, al-Fārūqī avoids simplistic and common delineations among religious groups. He acknowledges historical religious traditions in the institutional sense, but he provokes vital questions about the value attributed to the discrete borders drawn between such traditions. Furthermore, he draws upon similar ideas expressed by other contemporary scholars—especially Sachedina—but seeks to unite and integrate the various components into an overarching, egalitarian—yet principled—system.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored writings of contemporary Islamic scholars on the topic of religious diversity in order to highlight two dominant trends and an underlying conception of difference. By and large the individual assertions of contemporary scholars are valid and valuable; however, there are two crucial shortcomings. The first is the underlying conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. This conception results in the need to either neglect difference, isolate it, or rank it hierarchically. The first two, neglect and isolation, are not viable options in the contemporary era. The third, hierarchical assessment, is practically problematic as well. Moreover, it is conceptually insufficient in light of an understanding of the religious 'other' as the proximate other that blurs boundaries and compels ongoing, complex consideration. The

[143] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 141.
[144] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 144.

second and directly related shortcoming is the failure to integrate—rather than prioritize—a number of diverse topics including sameness, difference, interaction, dynamic relationality, and the teleological value of difference. I have briefly explored the work of Esack and al-Fārūqī because they offer indications of potential ways to overcome each of these shortcomings. Esack provides an explicit articulation of dynamic, integrated identity upon which he bases his subsequent interpretation of the Qurʾān, and al-Fārūqī constructs an elaborate model of religious difference that aims to account for many of the aforementioned topics.

In the remainder of this study, I will build upon these various contemporary contributions—especially those of Esack and al-Fārūqī—in an effort to articulate an alternative conception of difference and an integrated model of religious pluralism, which I have termed a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. This approach emerges in response to the perceived shortcomings in contemporary scholarship and takes its foundational insights primarily from three sources: contemporary Muslim women's interpretation of the Qurʾān, feminist approaches to religious pluralism, and Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis of the Qurʾān. In Part Two, I will explore these three foundations, and outline the alternative conception of difference and related hermeneutical method.

Chapter Four

Contemporary Muslim Women Interpreters of the Qurʾān: Hermeneutical Approach and Conception of Difference

1. Introduction

In outlining his hermeneutical approach, Farid Esack argues that it is imperative to 'center' Muslim minorities in contemporary Islamic discourse.[1] Referring primarily to Muslims who do not live under Muslim rule, he states that minority perspectives are uniquely equipped to offer significant contributions to "the discourse of cultural pluralism and diversity."[2] Minority perspectives, however, have been marginalized and ignored in efforts to articulate a "new relevance of Islam to contemporary challenges."[3] A critical contemporary challenge—for Esack and for this study—is religious diversity.

Contemporary discourse on religious diversity is characterized by shortcomings that stem primarily from a shared conception of difference as that which divides humanity by erecting clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. In response to these shortcomings and in an effort to lay foundations for overcoming them, in this chapter, I focus on the perspectives of a particular group of Muslims who are a minority in two ways: Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān working in the context of the United States. The United States is a minority context, as it is a situation in which Muslims do not live under Muslim rule. Moreover, Muslim

[1] Esack, "Religio-Cultural Diversity," 167-168.
[2] Esack, "Religio-Cultural Diversity," 168.
[3] Esack, "Religio-Cultural Diversity," 168. Esack acknowledges that the issue is not only that minority perspectives have been ignored, but also that sharing of perspectives across geographical and cultural boundaries has been limited.

women interpreters are a minority in terms of their interpretative contributions and interpretative authority.

While variously marginalized, insights garnered from this two-fold minority are an essential resource in the construction of an alternative approach to religious diversity for two central reasons. First, women—whether silent, silenced or unheard—have generally suffered from interpretative 'voicelessness' within Islamic history; the Islamic interpretative tradition has historically been dominated and controlled by men. Thus, the mere inclusion of a largely excluded voice has the potential to offer new insights. Second, the central interpretative task of these scholars is the elucidation of a Qurʾānic conception of human difference, specifically sexual (that is, biological) difference.[4] Elements of this specific conception of difference can be generalized and used as a guide in articulating other conceptions of human difference, in the case of this study, religious difference.

In this chapter, I will begin with a general survey of debates on Islam and feminism in order to highlight two dominant positions with regard to the validity of Islamic feminism. I will then explore the conceptual and hermeneutical contributions of Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān, focusing primarily on three scholars: Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan.[5] I will not endeavor to provide a comprehensive summary of their work nor an assessment of their various conclusions related to gender; rather, I will provide a critical overview of various aspects of their hermeneutical approaches and conceptions of sexual difference. I will conclude by examining the limited contributions these scholars have made to

[4] These scholars distinguish between biological sex (male/female) and gender (masculinity/femininity). As will become apparent, they argue that the former is addressed within the Qurʾān, whereas the latter is not.
[5] In addressing central issues related to women, biological sex, and gender, such as marriage, divorce, violence and custody, these scholars share much in common with other Muslim women scholars. I have specifically selected Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan, though, due to their explicit emphasis on hermeneutical approach; their attempts to articulate an underlying framework upon which sexual (biological) difference is to be understood; and their situatedness within the context of the United States. As a whole, however, contemporary Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān by no means form a monolithic or homogeneous group.

the discourse on religious diversity, and outlining general trajectories of investigation into religious difference that emanate from their conception of sexual difference.

2. Islam and/or Feminism?

What is the relationship between Islam and feminism? Is Islam compatible with feminism? Is feminism compatible with Islam, or are the two inherently contradictory? Is 'Islamic feminism' an oxymoron? Is feminism a 'Western' imposition upon Islam? Does the Islamic tradition offer resources for articulating an antipatriarchal and egalitarian view of humanity? If so, is such a view accurately referred to as 'Islamic feminism'? These are just some of the many questions that have spurred debate and controversy within global Muslim communities themselves and within the communities of scholars that study Muslims, Islam and women.[6]

As Valentine Moghadam indicates, two dominant positions with regard to Islamic feminism have emerged.[7] The first refers to Islamic feminism as a misnomer, and dismisses the search within the Islamic tradition for resources that support egalitarianism and women's rights as a limited and "compromised position."[8] The second affirms the validity of searching within the Islamic tradition, while simultaneously encompassing various opinions on the label 'Islamic feminism.' In this section, I will explore both of these positions, with greater emphasis on the latter since it is the position with which the Muslim women interpreters I focus on are aligned. Additionally, I will focus on the theoretical discussion of the validity and utility of

[6] A more extensive survey of some of these debates is presented in the chapter entitled "Competing Discourses" in *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith and Kathleen M. Moore, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 143-164. Cf. Aysha Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah: Methods, Limits, and Possibilities of 'Feminist Theology' in Islam" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009), 48-58.
[7] Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1135-1171, here 1142.
[8] Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism," 1142.

Islamic feminism rather than actual examples of 'Islamic feminism.' In the following sections, I will discuss a selection of Muslim women who aim to reinterpret the Qurʾān in order to highlight its egalitarianism. It is important to underscore, however, that there exists great variety—in methodologies and conclusions—in scholarly works devoted to explicating the relationship between Islam and women's rights. Some of these works fiercely critique Muslim society and the Islamic tradition with reference to the practice of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān.[9] Some use sociological and anthropological approaches to re-present the perspectives of Muslim women on contentious issues, such as *ḥijāb*.[10] Others examine traditional and contemporary exegesis in an effort to demonstrate diversity of interpretation and the impact of context on issues related to gender and women.[11]

A prominent example of the first stance on Islamic feminism is found in the work of Haideh Moghissi. In examining the relationship between feminism and Islamic fundamentalism, Moghissi offers a stern critique of intellectual tendencies that she describes as "making concessions to fundamentalist regimes and movements."[12] The crux of her critique is found in the diametric opposition she sees between the core ideas of feminism and the basic principles of Islam. Feminism's core idea is that

> women and men are biologically different, but this difference should not be translated into an unequal valuation of women's and men's experience; biology should not lead to differences in legal status, the privileging of one over the other.[13]

[9] For example, Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996).
[10] For example, Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and The Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002).
[11] For example, Anne Sofie Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001).
[12] Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 6.
[13] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 140.

The basic principles of Islam as outlined in the Qurʾān, however, do not support equal rights in the family nor in social life. Moghissi acknowledges the possibility of multiple interpretations of the Qurʾān, but she asserts that "no amount of twisting and bending can reconcile the Qurʾanic injunctions and instructions about women's rights and obligations with the idea of gender equality."[14]

Being a believer in the Muslim context means, according to Moghissi, that one accepts the Qurʾān, its non-egalitarian principles, and the resultant enshrinement of the "justice of sexual hierarchy" in law.[15] Consequently, she contends that no believer could simultaneously affirm the feminist notion of equality and the Islamic notion of equality. In line with the views of Hammed Shahidian and Shahrzad Mojab, Moghissi considers feminism and Islam incompatible.[16] She attempts to bolster this assessment by arguing that the notion of Islamic feminism is an outside imposition by "diasporic feminist academics and researchers of muslim background living and working in the West."[17] This is an intriguing contention, since—as will become apparent—a similar critique has been lodged by many against secular feminism. She also aims to demonstrate the incoherency of Islamic feminism by pointing out that very few scholars who engage in activities that could be referred to as Islamic feminism actually adopt the label Islamic feminist.[18]

---

[14] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 140.
[15] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 141-142.
[16] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 134, 141. Hammed Shahidian describes Islamic feminism as "inadequate" and as an "oxymoron." (Hammed Shahidian, "The Politics of the Veil: Reflections on Symbolism, Islam, and Feminism," *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present* 4, no. 2 [1997]: 325-337.) Shahrzad Mojab describes Islamic feminism as a "contradiction in terms" that "justifies unequal gender relationships." (Shahrzad Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'," *Feminist Review* 69 [Winter 2001]: 124-146. See also Shahrzad Mojab, "Islamic Feminism: Alternative or Contradiction?," *Fireweed*, no. 47 [Winter 1995]: 18-25.)
[17] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 126.
[18] Moghissi, *Feminism*, 126.

Valentine Moghadam also voices a similar perspective to that of Moghissi. She argues that, at best, the Islamic feminist strategy of reinterpreting the Qurʾān is limited and, at worst, it perpetuates patriarchy and dismisses secular feminism:

> So long as Islamic feminists remain focused on theological arguments rather than socioeconomic and political questions, and so long as their point of reference is the Qurʾan rather than universal standards, their impact will be limited at best. At worst, their strategy could reinforce the legitimacy of the Islamic system, help to reproduce it, and undermine secular alternatives.[19]

Moghadam, however, is more sympathetic to and supportive of the approach of Islamic feminists than other scholars. Nevertheless, she still views any improvements to women's status likely to be arrived at through Islamic feminism as restricted in comparison with the improvements capable of being achieved through secular feminism and secular institutions.[20]

Margot Badran is representative of the second position: the affirmation of the validity of searching within the Islamic tradition for resources that support egalitarianism and women's rights. Distinguishing between secular and Islamic feminisms, she defines the former as a feminism that is constituted by multiple discourses, including secular nationalist, modernist, human rights, and democratic discourses.[21] She defines the latter, Islamic feminism, as

[19] Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism," 1158. See also Kathleen McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue: The Case of Northern Nigeria* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 54.
[20] Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism," 1160-1161.
[21] Margot Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 6-28, here 6. This article is reprinted in Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 300-322. Exploring the development of these two feminisms in the Middle East context, Badran connects the rise of secular feminism with the decline of the Ottoman suzerainty and the emergence of nation states. Islamic feminism, according to Badran, arose in the Middle East in the 1990s in an atmosphere of disaffection with nation-states ability to "deliver democracy and foster broad economic prosperity" and in response to the spread of conservative Islamist readings of Islam that depicted women as second-class. (Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 7-9.) See also McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 23-28.

> a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm … which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qurʾan, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence.[22]

Even though Badran distinguishes between these two forms of feminism, she does not view them as being wholly discrete. Rather, secular and Islamic feminism are "enmeshed."[23] Furthermore, Badran argues that Islamic feminism "transcends and eradicates old binaries" between religious and secular, east and west.[24] It does so by drawing upon Islamic discourse and Islamic classical methodologies, as well as methodologies and insights from other sources. Additionally, Badran states that Islamic feminism is actually "more radical" than secular feminism because it insists on the full equality of women and men "across the public-private spectrum" not just in the public realm.[25] Secular feminism, according to Badran, accepts a model of complementary yet hierarchical gender roles within the family unit, whereas Islamic feminism directly connects social justice with gender equality in the family *and* in the public sphere.[26]

Though Badran claims that Islamic feminism obscures neat binary delineations between secular and religious, she acknowledges that the historical usage of these terms has fostered a problematic and circumscribed depiction of both. Historically,

> the term secular came to be associated with modernity, and often with the West, while 'religious' came to be thought of by proponents of secularism as 'traditional' and 'backward,' ultimately to the detriment of both.[27]

Moreover, in the midst of fierce identity politics, secular was further defined as "un-Islamic, anti-Islamic, and non-Islamic" and utilized as a tool of delegitimization by Islamists.[28]

---

[22] Margot Badran, "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?," in Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 242-252, here 242. Originally published in *al-Ahram* (January 17-23, 2002).
[23] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 11.
[24] Badran, "Islamic Feminism," 245.
[25] Badran, "Islamic Feminism," 250; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 14.
[26] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 14.
[27] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 10.

The implications of the association of secular with Western and un-Islamic are further elucidated by Riffat Hassan. In examining the relationship between Muslim societies and modernity, Hassan distinguishes between two aspects of modernity: modernization and Westernization. She contends that while many Muslim societies were positively inclined towards modernization—defined as "science, technology and material progress"—they were opposed to Westernization "which was associated with promiscuity and all kinds of social problems."[29] 'Emancipated' women—those women that blurred the traditional boundaries between public and private space—were not seen as products of modernization, but rather as icons of Westernization. Thus, every discourse—including feminism—that encouraged emancipation was likewise associated with secularism and Westernization, the purported binary opposites of Islam and religion. Discourses aimed at emancipation and women's rights were depicted as secular, Western transplantations into Islam, and delegitimized on that basis.[30]

Contemporary scholars and activists who attempt to use the Islamic tradition as a basis for affirming women's rights and human equality often find themselves contending with the residual impact of these dual historical circumscriptions. From the secular side, their religious approach is depicted as traditional and backward. From the religious side, their 'feminism' is depicted as modern, Western, and thus un-Islamic. This has contributed to the reticence of many scholars and activists who do the work that Badran defines as Islamic feminism about identifying themselves as Islamic feminists.[31] Thus, while Badran promotes the label of Islamic

---

[28] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 10-11.
[29] Riffat Hassan, "Feminist Theology: The Challenges for Muslim Women," in *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. Haideh Moghissi (London: Routledge, 2005), 195-208, here 199. Originally published in *Critique* 9 (Fall 1996): 53-65.
[30] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 14.
[31] See also McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 46-49.

feminism and refers to the work of other scholars and activists in that manner, she recognizes that the appellation is not one that is accepted by all of those to whom she refers.[32] Badran also argues that discomfort with the term is related to the "inability to move beyond the notion that feminism is Western and a colonial imposition,"[33] a notion which she rejects when she asserts the multiplicity of feminisms and the fact that feminisms can and do originate in Muslim contexts.[34]

Discomfort with the label Islamic feminism may, however, be a more complex phenomenon than Badran describes. Surely, the desire to retain (or establish) resonance and authority within Muslim communities is a consideration for these scholars. They are, after all, seeking to effect change in those very communities. Therefore, they must be aware of and responsive to common—albeit oversimplified—communal assessments of feminism as a Western "clone" or "colonialist intrusion."[35] The reticence, however, stems not only from the stereotypical depiction of feminism as Western, but also from the opposite stereotype, that is, the depiction of religious (and thus Islamic) approaches as backward and compromised.

In a response to the work of Badran, Asma Barlas exemplifies some of the complexity associated with the application of and self-identification with the label Islamic feminism.[36] Barlas states that she initially and intentionally referred to herself as a "believing woman," and was therefore angered by the application of the label Islamic feminism to her work. Moving beyond anger, she attempted to explain the rationale behind her intentional distinction, highlighting the fact that most feminists believe that "Islam is, by definition, patriarchal,

[32] Badran, "Islamic Feminism," 244; Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 14-15.
[33] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 15.
[34] Margot Badran, "Islam on the Move," in Badran, *Feminism and Islam*, 323-338, here 325-326.
[35] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 14. I do not mean to imply that they need to accept this depiction. Rather, I mean that in effecting change they need to know their audience and the obstacles that may arise in addressing and challenging that audience.
[36] Asma Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial, or, My On-again, Off-again Affair with Feminism: Response to Margot Badran" (paper presented at Ithaca College, October 2006). Available online at http://faculty.ithaca.edu/abarlas/.

misogynistic, violent and fundamentalist."[37] This assessment was in direct contradiction to her own view of the Qurʾān as egalitarian and anti-patriarchal. Her epistemological approach to and understanding of the Qurʾān vastly diverged from the approach of and understanding held by the majority of feminists. When she encountered the person and work of Badran—who "rather than locating the Qur'an within feminist discourses ... re-located feminism in the Qur'an"[38]—Barlas gained a new appreciation for the term Islamic feminism as a discourse on gender equality that derived its mandate from the Qurʾān and sought human rights and justice in public and private spheres. Ultimately, however, Barlas has again moved away from the label and reasserted that the views she expresses are not feminist, but rather Qurʾānic or Islamic.[39]

What is evident in Barlas' reflection on her own identification or otherwise with Islamic feminism is that the issue is complex and involves power and authority. Barlas recognizes the power of 'naming,' but she aims to assert her own agency in that process in order to resist all forms of feminism that associate Islam with oppression and the West with liberation.[40] She has also asserted her own agency in order to make a direct—and challenging—claim to legitimacy within the Islamic discourse by referring to her own approach as simply Qurʾānic or Islamic.

In line with Badran, miriam cooke also affirms the possibility of Islamic feminism and the label, based upon her general definition of feminists as "women who think and do something about changing expectations for women's social roles and responsibilities."[41] As this definition suggests, cooke aligns Islamic feminism not only with intellectual endeavors but

[37] Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial," 2.
[38] Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial," 2.
[39] Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial," 4.
[40] Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s," 13; Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial," 4. It is worth noting that other groups of women have also struggled with adopting the label feminism, for example mujerista and womanist theologians.
[41] miriam cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), ix.

also with action; Islamic feminism involves "awareness, rejection, and activism."[42] Significantly, she does not depict these as progressive stages nor as three requirements that must be present in order to denote Islamic feminism. Any of the three aspects may emerge first, and any of the three may exist in isolation. This broad definition of Islamic feminism is directly related to her central argument that Islamic feminism as a label does not relate to a particular identity, but rather is a "speaking position."[43] Dismissing the very possibility of a singular, fixed identity, cooke states that speaking positions are multiple, dynamic and strategically chosen in particular contexts by diverse individuals:[44]

> Throughout the twentieth century there has been much talk of identity: losing identity to imposed cultures and their values; uncovering lost identity; regaining authentic identity; asserting identity as member of a disadvantaged group; identity politics. In each case, identity is tied to birth, to place, to language, to community, to religion, and to gender. Identity confers rights. Identity takes rights away. But what is this singular, unified identity? If identity is the recognition of sameness with some and difference with others, then we have many identities. To retain a sense of wholeness, we usually assert only one of many possible identities, the one that gives authority at the moment of assertion. This speaking position is not an identity, but rather an ascribed or chosen identification.[45]

In order to support the multiplicity of identity and the dynamic connection between choice of speaking position and authority, cooke deliberately examines the contributions of scholars—including Nawal El Saadawi, Zaynab al-Ghazālī, Assia Djebar, and Fatima Mernissi—who problematize the artificial notion of a stable, essential identity.[46] Furthermore, she contends that Islamic feminists assume a rhetorical strategy of 'multiple critique,' which

---

[42] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, x. Gisela Webb refers to people engaged in scholarship and action related to women's rights as "scholar-activists" and presents excerpts from the work of many such individuals in her book. See Gisela Webb, ed., *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2000).
[43] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, xxvii, 53.
[44] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, 59-61. This is consistent with Badran's assertion that Islamic feminism can be the product or concern of religious Muslims, secular Muslims, and non-Muslims. (Badran, "Islamic Feminism," 243-244.)
[45] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, 53-54.
[46] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, xxvii, 53, 138.

allows them to refuse inscribed boundaries and claim simultaneous and sometimes conflicting allegiances.[47] Multiple critique is a "fluid discursive strategy" that enables Islamic feminists to assume multiple speaking positions and in so doing to identify with and assert authority within multiple communities.[48]

While cooke's description of multiple identity and multiple critique is accurate, it is imperative to recognize that fluidity in identity and positioning can be both an asset and a liability; it can be a space both "full of opportunity and full of danger."[49] Scholars and activists who engage in Islamic feminism can identify and assert authority in multiple communities, but this multiple belonging can also cause their authority and identity to be challenged in the very same communities. Amina Wadud refers to this as the dual reality of "intra-academia backlash" and "intra-Islamic backlash."[50] In the academic community, the faith commitment of Islamic feminists can be seen as compromising objectivity and serious intellectual engagement.[51] This is exacerbated by the fact that most research on Muslim women is not carried out by Muslim women themselves.[52] While some 'confessional' Muslim women scholars have garnered academic acceptance, others have continued to feel that that acceptance is marginal or token, rather than based upon appreciation of the rigor and insight of their specific scholarly contributions.[53] In Muslim communities, Islamic feminist's academic

[47] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, xxvii, 59-60. See also miriam cooke, "Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142-160.
[48] cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, xxvii, 53, 113.
[49] Margot Badran, "Toward Islamic Feminisms: A Look at the Middle East," in Badran, *Feminism in* Islam, 236. Originally published in Asma Afsaruddin, ed., *Hermeneutics and Honor in Islamic/ate Societies*, Harvard Middle East Monograph series (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999).
[50] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 69.
[51] Juliane Hammer, "Identity, Authority, and Activism: American Muslim Women Approach the Qurʾān," *The Muslim World* 98 (October 2008), 443-464, here 453-456; Amina Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1, (1995-1996): 37-50, here 39.
[52] Amina Wadud, "Response: Roundtable Discussion, Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 90-100, here 99. See also Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 61-62, 66, 72.
[53] Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 69.

affiliations and their conclusions on gender can be depicted as diverging from traditional methods and knowledge and, as such, as being of little value and great risk.

It is also imperative to highlight the similarity between cooke's views on identity and those expressed by Esack, as discussed in Chapter Three. Based upon this similarity, cooke's views not only illuminate central dynamics in the Islamic discourse on women's rights, but they also underscore the importance of this perspective to discussions of religious difference. cooke, like Esack, dismisses the concept of fixed, bounded identity, the precise concept that I argue has led to shortcomings in the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity.

In this study, I have chosen not to apply the label 'Islamic feminism' to the scholars I explore. While they are engaged in work that both Badran and cooke would describe a Islamic feminism, I have opted to refer to them with the descriptive—albeit somewhat unwieldy—phrase Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. In this project—based upon the work of Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān—I have adopted the label or, to borrow cooke's terminology, the speaking position of '*Muslima* theology.'[54] I have done so in order to capture three core elements of my approach. First, similar to Muslim women interpreters, my approach arises out of my positioning as a believing and practicing Muslim. Second, my approach arises out of my positioning as a woman. Part of this positioning is a result of my individual experiences as a woman. However, another aspect of it results from a deliberate choice to align myself with scholarly reflections on women's experience. It is therefore not only an experiential positioning, but also a theoretical positioning. Third, my approach is theological in that it endeavors to engage in interpretation, but also to consciously and explicitly go beyond exegetical work to formulate a theological conception based upon that

[54] *Muslima* literally means a female Muslim, or a female who submits to the will of God.

exegesis. I do not apply this designation—that is, *Muslima* theology—to the work of other scholars, but I leave open the possibility that it may be applicable to similar efforts.

3. Muslim Women Interpreters of the Qurʾān: Hermeneutical Approach

The hermeneutical approach of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Riffat Hassan is rooted in the relationship between their self-identification as Muslim women[55] and the manner in which such an identification influences their choice of interpretative sources, methods, and concerns. Many—including many Muslim women—have addressed the topics of gender, women, and Islam by drawing upon "an amalgam of Islamic modernist, secular nationalist, and humanitarian (and later human rights) discourses"[56] in order to advocate for gender equality. While recognizing similar inequalities and injustices in reference to women, Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan, however, adopt a different approach. They aim to ameliorate the conditions of women and to redefine their status by returning to the Islamic sources themselves and reinterpreting them.[57] This does not mean that they are inherently opposed to the use of extra-Islamic ideas and insights, but rather that they begin with a positive valuation of the primary Islamic source—the Qurʾān—and with the conviction that the Qurʾān does not promote injustice or inequity.[58] The return to and reinterpretation of the Qurʾān is seen as an effective and necessary weapon in combating injustice and reconceptualizing women's roles and status.

Thus the central defining feature in the hermeneutical approach of Wadud, Barlas and Hassan becomes their focus on and prioritization of the Qurʾān. From a faith-based

[55] Amina Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Texts from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), x; Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qurʾan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 19; and Riffat Hassan, "Islam," in *Her Voice, Her Faith: Women Speak on World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Cambridge: Westview, 2003), 215-242, here 215-218.
[56] Margot Badran, *Feminism Beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (New Delhi: Global Media, 2007), 35-36.
[57] Badran, *Feminism Beyond East and West*, 28.
[58] Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 308.

perspective, they view the Qurʾān as the "inimitable, inviolate, inerrant, and incontrovertible"[59] Word of God. The Qurʾān's content and order are held to be unified, intentional, and purposeful.[60] The Qurʾān is not simply a compilation of various verses revealed throughout the course of twenty-two years to Prophet Muhammad; rather, it is a unified whole that expresses a divinely-intended worldview and moral ethos.

Underlying this view of the Qurʾān is a staunch critique of what Wadud refers to as 'traditional' *tafsīr*, a genre of exegesis—whether classical or modern—that largely utilizes an atomistic methodology, working through the Qurʾān in a linear fashion making minimal effort "to recognize themes and to discuss the relationship of the Qur'an to itself, thematically."[61] In challenging this primarily male—and largely androcentric—interpretative approach,[62] Wadud and Barlas advocate a hermeneutic that emphasizes textual holism, textual unity, and an overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*.[63] The exegetical task, therefore, involves a continual interpretative struggle to understand the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*; to derive central hermeneutical principles from it; and to interpret verses with continuous reference to that worldview and those principles. In order to do so, these scholars primarily advocate *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān*, exegesis of the Qurʾān based on the Qurʾān.[64] Through close intratextual reading; through cross referencing of grammar, syntax, terminology, and structure; through

[59] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 33. See also Aysha Hidayatullah, "Inspiration and Struggle: Muslim Feminist Theology and the Work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25, no.1 (2009): 162-170, here 167.
[60] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 21.
[61] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 2.
[62] Riffat Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," in *Feminism and World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 248-278, here 250; Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 9; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 2.
[63] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 3-4; Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 8.
[64] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5.

contextualization and recontextualization; and through elucidation of larger Qurʾānic themes, the Qurʾān becomes the principal source of its own intratextual explication.[65]

While Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan all acknowledge other interpretative sources, including the *sunna* (practice of Muḥammad), *aḥādīth* (narrations of the practices of Muḥammad), *ʾijmāʿ* (consensus of scholars), and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), they hold the Qurʾān to be the main standard for theological reinterpretation. It is important to clarify this position. None of these scholars unequivocally dismisses secondary sources; they do not advocate a Qurʾān-only approach. Rather, they argue that secondary sources must be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion or "skepticism"[66] that gives precedence to the Qurʾānic message and Qurʾānic ethos, a hermeneutic that prioritizes the Qurʾān and uses it to assess secondary sources. This is especially important in light of the fact that all three of these scholars contend that it is from the secondary sources that the majority of patriarchal, androcentric and unjust ideas about women have arisen and/or been legitimated. Their approach is designed to facilitate the 'unreading' of such ideas.

Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan are adamant about underscoring the fact that every encounter with the Qurʾānic text—including their own—is an act of interpretation.[67] It is not possible simply to read the text and uncover its singular meaning. Rather, interpretation is an encounter between the text itself and an interpreter's "prior text,"[68] meaning their historical and cultural situatedness, the context they bring to the 'reading' of the text. There exists a

[65] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 16-18; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5. See also Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah," 118-119.
[66] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 249.
[67] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 17.
[68] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 1.

dialectical interplay between these various elements, in which "every 'reading' reflects, in part, the intentions of the text, as well as the 'prior text' of the one who makes the 'reading'."[69]

Citing and drawing theoretically upon Fazlur Rahman's notion of a "double movement,"[70] they seek to understand the text by comprehending the original context and then extracting general principles or a general worldview, which can then be applied to the contemporary context. Barlas demonstrates, however, that the topic of context is not confined to questions of historical situatedness. Contextualization is an issue that arises within the Qurʾān itself (i.e., intratextually), between the Qurʾān and other Islamic sources (i.e., intertextually), and between the Qurʾān and historical context (i.e., extratextually). Barlas thus highlights the need for a multifaceted exploration of context, an exploration not only in terms of the text in history, but also—and initially—in terms of the text within and in reference to itself.

Barlas is also concerned with the implications of the historical conflation—and even 'overshadowing'[71]—of the text with interpretation. This conflation not only misconstrues the role of the interpreter, presenting interpreters as receptive vessels without any impact or influence on the meaning. It is also directly tied to an obsession with textual monovalency or monosemy, the notion that the text has only one—or more accurately, only one *correct*—meaning. Contrary to this view, Barlas argues that the Qurʾānic text is in fact polysemic, open to multiple readings or interpretations.[72] This polysemy of the text is not seen as a weakness or

[69] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 1.
[70] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 3-4, 31; Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 21. See also Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982); Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalisms*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000). For a concise overview of the Rahman's approach as utilized by these scholars, see Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah," 33-38, 126-128.
[71] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 39.
[72] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 33. Cf. Herbert Berg, "Polysemy in the Qurʾān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), vol. 4, 155. Berg argues that the Islamic exegetical tradition as a

something to be overcome—even if overcoming it were possible, which she contends it is not—but rather it is the essential nature of a universal text.[73]

Describing the Qurʾān as a "catalyst affecting behavior in society," Wadud similarly claims that it is not subjectivity that impedes universal relevance, but rather that it is "when one individual reader with a particular world-view and specific prior text asserts that his or her reading is the only possible or permissible one."[74] Such an assertion prevents readers in various contexts from forming "their own *relationship* to the text."[75] Wadud's use of the word 'relationship' is worth considering in more depth. Relationship implies the ongoing interplay between text and context explicated above. The act of interpretation or reading is not monovalent, where the text disseminates a fixed meaning to all people in all times. Nor is it a situation in which the interpreter has completely free reign over the interpretation. These scholars conceive of interpretation as an ongoing relationship, engagement and encounter with divine discourse, and the Divine itself. If either extreme—monovalency or complete relativism—is privileged, the universal message is lost.

Polysemy, therefore, does not equate to hermeneutical relativism. While the Qurʾān does say multiple things, it does not say everything; the Qurʾān does not permit every possible interpretation. While there is never one, final interpretation of the Qurʾān, there will always be convergences in interpretation based upon the fact that the text and principles are unchangeable.[76] Beyond these inevitable convergences, however, there is still an imperative

---

whole has embraced the notion of polysemy, and he discusses *wujūh* (polysemes and homonyms), *naẓāʾir* (synonyms or analogues), *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl, and ẓāhir* and *bāṭin.*

[73] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 25, 60.

[74] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5.

[75] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5. Italics mine.

[76] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5.

and an ability to evaluate various interpretations.[77] Barlas invokes the concept "best precepts"[78] and derives methodological criteria from the Qurʾān for interpreting and assessing interpretations. These criteria include intratextual holism; reading for best meanings; and using analytical reasoning.[79] While, in keeping with the notion of polysemy, she frankly admits that it is difficult to identify *the* "best reading," she argues that is feasible to outline a field of possible interpretations and thus rule out many that fall clearly outside of that field.[80]

Another central aspect of Wadud's, Barlas', and Hassan's interpretative approaches is the significance they attribute to textual silence. In outlining the main principles of her intra-textual Qurʾānic method of analysis, Wadud describes attentiveness to "Qurʾanic ellipses and textual silences" as the second most important principle of reinterpretation.[81] These ellipses and silences are meaningful and an effort should be made to interpret them in holistic reference to the entire Qurʾān. Barlas describes Qurʾānic silence as "symbolically suggestive" and argues that silence should not automatically be construed legalistically as "consent."[82] Other possible meanings—such as opposition, resistance, indifference—should be considered in relation to Qurʾānic themes.

Hassan provides a vivid illustration of the emphasis on silence in her exploration of three "fundamental assumptions and attitudes"[83] relating to the creation and status of women:

---

[77] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 39; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 95.
[78] Asma Barlas, "'Holding Fast by the Best in the Precepts' – The Qurʾan and Method," in *New Directions in Islamic Thought*, ed. Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen and Christian Moe (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 17-22.
[79] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 15.
[80] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 16-18. "Best readings" is an allusion to Qurʾān 39:18: "Those who listen to what is said and follow what is best. These are the ones God has guided; these are the people of understanding."
الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُوْلَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمْ أُوْلُوا الْأَلْبَابِ
[81] Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice," 44. The first principle is the prioritization of universals over particulars.
[82] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 22.
[83] Riffat Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 39-64, here 43.

that man is God's primary creation; that woman was the cause of the Fall of mankind; and that woman was "created not only *from* man but also *for* man."[84] Hassan's methodology for examining these assumptions not only involves identifying extra-Qurʾānic sources of these ideas, but also returning to the Qurʾān, examining what it *does* say on a particular topic, but also emphasizing what it *does not* say. When she tackles the second assumption, for example, her analysis begins by discussing "collective" disobedience,[85] but then moves to focus chiefly on the absence of account of the Fall in the Qurʾān.[86] If the Qurʾān, as the Word of God, is silent on a topic, this silence should be an important consideration in exegetical efforts. Silence therefore is not a *carte blanche* to fill in the blanks with information derived from other sources or cultural norms, especially when that information is inconsistent with the overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*.

The preceding example from Hassan also touches on the theological implications of certain interpretations. While many continue to be ready and willing to accept the notion that woman was responsible for the Fall of humanity, ironically when isolated from the discussion of woman's culpability or status, very few are inclined to accept the concept of the Fall itself. As was seen in the discussion of al-Fārūqī in Chapter Three, this notion is held to be widely inconsistent with Islamic theological anthropology.[87] Muslim women interpreters, in advocating a unified, holistic approach to interpretation, stress the necessity of exposing such interconnections and implications, and then using them as a system of exegetical checks and balances.

[84] Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 44.
[85] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 257.
[86] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 257-260.
[87] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 137-138.

While Hassan employs theological implications in order to deconstruct extant interpretations, Barlas draws out theological interconnections and implications to construct the central principles of her hermeneutical approach. Highlighting the connection between divine ontology and divine disclosure (or speech), she states that any attempt to comprehend divine speech—that is, the Qurʾān—must be connected to or guided by an understanding of the divine "Being."[88] She then selects three theological principles to guide her interpretation: divine unity, divine justness, and divine incomparability.[89] By crafting her hermeneutical approach in this manner, Barlas stresses that no one topic of interpretation exists in isolation nor can it be compartmentalized; they are intertwined with and have direct implications for other aspects of theology.

Interpretation should not only consider theological implications, it must also consider social, moral and ethical implications. Hassan holds that the real-life oppression of women is rooted in theological interpretation, and that in order to overcome such oppression androcentric and misogynist theological foundations must be "demolished."[90] Wadud similarly connects interpretation and practical implications when she critiques "careless and restrictive" interpretations that have comprehensively and adversely impacted the lives of women.[91] Interpretation is not simply a game of meaning for these scholars; it is an endeavor that has immediate implications for the real lives of human beings. Interpretation of the Qurʾān defines practice, potentially changes practice, and at the very least legitimizes practice. For these scholars, therefore, the goal should be to articulate interpretations that are

[88] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 15.
[89] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 13. Hidayatullah refers to the use of various aspects of divine ontology as hermeneutical principles as the "*tawhidic* paradigm." (See Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah," 215-216.)
[90] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 252.
[91] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 97.

simultaneously theologically, contextually, and practically sound;[92] the goal should be to formulate interpretations that highlight theological interconnections, that consider historical and contemporary contexts, and that undermine—or at least do not perpetuate—injustice and oppression.

4. Muslim Women Interpreters of the Qurʾān: Conception of Difference

In addition to their hermeneutical approach, the conception of human difference presented by Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan also serves as a foundational component of the *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism I aim to articulate. While these interpreters focus specifically on one genre of difference—sexual difference—they nevertheless proffer an underlying framework upon which to understand human sameness, difference, and the relationship between the two.

Muslim women interpreters endeavor to return to the Qurʾān in order to garner a more comprehensive understanding of the Qurʾānic discourse on men and women. This reinterpretation is largely impelled by the social and historical realities of women and the related patriarchal interpretations of Islamic sources. Such patriarchal interpretations, according to Barlas, are grounded in a binary conception of sexual differentiation, which presents man as the primary subject and woman as the wholly and completely 'other.'[93] This conception is based upon the extension of sexual difference—that is, biological difference—to an all-encompassing category that determines all aspects of human ontology and establishes a "gender dualism" in which "biology (sex)" is confused with "its social meanings (gender)."[94] This conception is problematic for two main reasons. First, it depicts one biological trait as

[92] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 98.
[93] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 129. See also, Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice," 42.
[94] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 130.

determinative of all aspects—moral, social, ontological—of a specific group. Second, it not only conceives of the groups—men and women—as wholly distinct, but more specifically it depicts the groups as being in opposition.[95] Thus, in this patriarchal conception that emphasizes difference only, men are the central human subjects, and women are everything that men are not. Difference is pervasive and situated in a static hierarchy.

Responding to this difference-only conception, Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan begin their exploration by focusing on sameness rather than difference. All three of these scholars commence with a discussion of the Qurʾānic discourse on "the origin and nature of human creation," in the hope of undermining the "notions of radical difference and hierarchy"[96] that characterize the exclusive focus on sexual difference. According to Hassan, the fact that it is generally considered "self-evident that women are not equal to men who are 'above' women or have a 'degree of advantage' over them"[97] is intimately related to certain pervasive theological assumptions about creation. As discussed in the preceding section, Hassan identifies three such assumptions: that man is God's primary creation; that woman was the cause of the Fall of mankind; and that woman was "created not only *from* man but also *for* man."[98] In an effort understand the foundations of these assumptions and deconstruct them, she formulates three related guiding questions: how woman was created; whether woman was responsible for the Fall; and why woman was created.[99] These questions guide her analysis, leading her to emphasize "undifferentiated humanity,"[100] the lack of a concept of the 'Fall' in the Qurʾān, and

[95] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 131.
[96] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 133.
[97] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 253.
[98] Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 44.
[99] Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 46.
[100] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 255.

equal status and responsibility for both men and women. Hassan summarizes her analysis, stating,

> Not only does the Qurʾān make it clear that man and woman stand absolutely equal in the sight of God, but also that they are 'members' and 'protectors' of each other. In other words, the Qurʾān does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women, nor does it pit men against women in an adversary relationship.[101]

Wadud is concerned with similar assumptions and consequently explores four creation-related Qurʾānic words or concepts (*āya, min, nafs*, and *zawj*),[102] as well as the Qurʾānic discourse on the Garden of Eden[103] and the Hereafter.[104] Based upon this, she confirms Hassan's analysis, arguing that there is no distinction between men and women in regard to their creation, their status as subjects of divine guidance, or their status as recipients of rewards or punishments.[105] In other words, every individual is created in the same manner. At the time of creation, every individual is placed into the same direct and intimate relationship with God. And, every individual has the same potential for reaping rewards or punishments in the Hereafter. In surveying the "ontology of a Single Self," the ontology of the *nafs*, Barlas arrives at the same conclusion: "men and women originate in the same Self, at the same time, and in the same way; that is, they are ontologically coeval and coequal."[106]

By focusing initially on sameness, Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan advance three main conclusions. First, there is no inherent hierarchy in the human creation; the *nafs*, or humanity, was created as one without differentiation. Second, the conception of the *zawj*, or pair, does not imply derivative status or an oppositional relationship. Rather, a pair is conceived of as

[101] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 262.
[102] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 17-20.
[103] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 23-25.
[104] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 44-53.
[105] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 15.
[106] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 136.

two "equally essential" forms of "a single reality … two congruent parts formed to fit together."[107] Third, women are not responsible for a rift between humanity and God, as no such collective rift exists within the Qurʾān and culpability is assessed on an individual basis. Furthermore, women do not exist in a collective, mediated or indirect relationship with God.

While Wadud, Barlas and Hassan all initiate their reinterpretations by focusing on sameness, they do not aim to replace the difference only approach with one based upon sameness only. In fact, an exclusive emphasis on sameness is deemed to be "equally phallocentric"[108] as the emphasis on difference alone. As with difference, if sameness is considered in isolation, sameness is extended to all aspects of human ontology, thus obliterating or ignoring vital and valuable difference. Furthermore, a sameness-only focus extends one norm to all individuals and groups.[109] According to Barlas, even in a sameness-only approach, man remains the normative subject and woman remains the 'other.' Thus the male norm is generalized and presented as a universal human norm, a "paradigm to define women."[110] The affirmation of a shared egalitarian humanity, therefore, does not result in an understanding of humanity as homogeneous. These scholars acknowledge differences between men and women; they are not interested in denying—or reducing—difference. What they are interested in is contesting the "pervasive (and oftentimes perverse) tendency to view differences as evidence of inequality"[111] and the resultant hierarchy, which has customarily depicted women as inferior, derivative, and in an indirect relationship with God.[112]

[107] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 21.
[108] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 132.
[109] Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice," 42.
[110] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 132, 11.
[111] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 5.
[112] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 264.

They are also interested in articulating a new framework for simultaneously affirming both human sameness and difference without resorting to a partitioned view of human existence. As Barlas clarifies, some interpreters of the Qurʾān willingly concede the equality—or sameness—of men and women in the moral realm of worship, '*ibāda*.[113] This equality, however, is not extended to the social realm. Thus, while women may be created with equal capacity for righteousness and may be held equally responsible before God, they are not equal in the context of human-to-human encounters. Sameness characterizes human nature and potentially even the relationship of an individual to God; hierarchal difference reigns in social interaction. Barlas denounces this bifurcation, arguing that such a division of the moral and social realms fails to account for the fact that "the Qurʾān defines moral personality in terms not only of '*Ibadah*, but also in terms of responsibility to the *ummah*, and the two are connected and inseparable."[114]

The alternative approach articulated by Muslim women interpreters aims to affirm sameness and to "think of difference itself differently so as to de-link it from biology and also from social hierarchies and inequalities."[115] Their conception of difference, in contrast to the difference-only approach, does not ascribe sexual difference to essential human nature.[116] As should be readily apparent from the preceding discussion of human creation, the essential human nature is universal in men and women. This being said, difference is not depicted as degeneration from an original and perfect state of unity and sameness. As expounded upon by Wadud in her analysis of *Sūrat al-nisāʾ*, God created the undifferentiated *nafs* and then the

[113] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 148.
[114] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 148.
[115] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 132.
[116] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 7, 15.

zawj.[117] This indicates that difference was also divinely-intended. If difference is not a result of degeneration but is divinely-intended, then it is something that should not be eradicated: "by representing differences as an expression of God's Will … the Qurʾān … establishes the inappropriateness of trying to erase or obliterate them."[118]

Divine intentionality also implies value and purposefulness, and for these scholars that value or purpose is defined in terms of functionality, mutuality, and complementarity.[119] Difference is not conceived of as something that divides or establishes bounded groups. On the contrary—through the examination of the Qurʾānic themes of divinely-intended "dualism" and diversity in creation[120]—they envision difference as the impetus towards the basis of a unique form of relationality in which neither particularity (maleness or femaleness) is automatically privileged, but where the two are ideally engaged in a relationship of mutual benefit and functionality.[121]

While they stress functionality, they do not envision it as being monolithically defined or fixed, except in reference to child-bearing.[122] These interpreters are careful to emphasize that while difference exists and prompts relationships, there is not one set model of relationship for all times and places for either the male or female. The Qurʾān "does not strictly delineate the roles of women and the roles of man to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender."[123] Biological functions remain, but culturally-determined roles are diverse and dynamic. Wadud emphasizes this flexibility through the Qurʾānic concept of

[117] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 19-20.
[118] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 146.
[119] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 65.
[120] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 20-23.
[121] Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," 265; Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 179; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 8, 102.
[122] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 64-65. Wadud is keen to distinguish child-bearing (the biological process of becoming pregnant, carrying the child, and giving birth) from child-rearing, the socialization and care for the child. It is only the former which she states is confined to women.
[123] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 64-65.

maʿrūf,[124] which means "well-known" and "equitable." This concept is often invoked in Qurʾānic verses detailing proper relationships between men and women.[125] Based upon this, Wadud argues that it implies a contextual sensitivity and flexibility. Barlas reiterates the same flexibility and dynamism by adamantly differentiating between biological sexual difference and the concept of gender. According to Barlas, the Qurʾān acknowledges the former but "does not even use the concept of gender to speak about humans."[126] Gender is a reified concept of static, rigid roles that is superimposed upon the text.

While sexual difference serves a functional and relational purpose, it never serves as the basis for hierarchical differentiation between people. Sexual difference differentiates "laterally"—meaning it distinguishes individuals without ascribing value—but it does not differentiate "hierarchically."[127] Individuals are not assessed on the basis of their biology: "sex is irrelevant."[128] Wadud and Barlas maintain that the only basis for differentiating hierarchically between individuals is *taqwā*, or piety.[129] *Taqwā* is tied to and assessed on the individual level, rather than based on affiliation with a particular group, that is, men or women. This, however, does not mean that an individual can strive for or achieve *taqwā* in isolation. *Taqwā* is always defined in the context of multiple relationships. Every individual is capable and responsible for him or herself, [130] but capacity and responsibility can only be actualized in relation to God, one's self, and other humans. The importance of this relationality is reflected in the structure of Wadud's reinterpretation. She begins with human origins and creation (the relation of human to God), moves to discuss women as individuals (human to

[124] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 69.
[125] For example, Qurʾān 2:228-236 that deal with divorce, childrearing, widows, and marriage.
[126] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 11.
[127] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 145.
[128] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 11.
[129] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 143; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 37.
[130] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 144.

self), then women in the Hereafter (human to God), and finally the "rights and roles" of women in the social context (human to human).

Wadud's discussion of *taqwā* also provides a concise summary of the overall conception of difference espoused by these Muslim women interpreters of Qurʾān. Interpreting *āya* 13 of *Sūrat al-ḥujurāt*,[131] Wadud states,

> It begins with creation. Then, it acknowledges the pair: male and female. These are then incorporated into larger and smaller groups ... 'that you may know one another.' ... The culmination of this verse and its central aspect for this discussion is ... *taqwā*.[132]

Muslim women interpreters' conception of difference begins with sameness; acknowledges intentional difference; conceives of the relationship between sameness and difference as purposeful and functional; and concludes with the assertion that evaluative differentiation is possible only on the basis of individual *taqwā* as manifest in a multifaceted series of relationships.

5. Forays into Religious Difference

While Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan have not engaged extensively in the discourse on religious difference or in the field of theology of religions, they have all drawn general connections between oppression based upon sexual difference and oppression based upon other forms of difference, including religious difference. Additionally, both Hassan and Barlas have specifically—yet somewhat cursorily—addressed the topic of religious diversity.[133]

---

[131] Qurʾān 49:13: "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him [has the most *taqwā*]: God is all knowing, all aware."
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

[132] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 37.

[133] I have not included their writings in the preceding chapter due to the comparatively limited nature of their contributions, as well as the fact that they do not explicitly engage with the field of theology of religions. While

The general correlation between various forms of oppression is apparent in Wadud's critique of men "who require a level of human dignity and respect for themselves while denying that level to another human, *for whatever reasons*."[134] She echoes this same concern with an explicit reference to religious difference when she argues that the contradiction between the intention of the Qurʾānic discourse and the historical development of Islamic civilization has resulted in a lack of social justice "particularly for women and non-Muslim minorities."[135]

Hassan voices similar sentiments to those expressed by Wadud,[136] but she also writes explicitly on the Qurʾānic perspective on religious pluralism. In line with many of the contemporary approaches discussed in Chapter Three, Hassan identifies *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) as the central defining principle in the Qurʾānic view of religious diversity; since God is one, God creates and cares for all of humanity.[137] Hassan also emphasizes what she refers to as the "non-exclusive spirit of Islam" by presenting Muḥammad's prophethood as universal; the Qurʾān as affirming previous revelations; and the Qurʾān as granting rights to all of humanity irrespective of belief.[138] Addressing the intentional nature of religious diversity, Hassan contends that

---

their ideas do overlap with some of the scholars surveyed in Chapter Three, they do not intentionally engage those scholars or the larger field.

[134] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 96. Italics mine. See also Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice," 41.

[135] Wadud, "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice," 38.

[136] "To me, in the final analysis, post-patriarchal Islam is nothing other than Qurʾānic Islam, which is profoundly concerned with freeing human beings—women as well as men—from the bondage of traditionalism, authoritarianism (religious, political, economic, or any other), tribalism, racism, sexism, slavery, or anything else that prohibits or inhibits human beings from actualizing the Qurʾānic vision of human destiny embodied in the classical proclamation, 'Towards God is thy limit.'" (Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 60-61.)

[137] Riffat Hassan, "The Qurʾanic Perspective on Religious Pluralism," in *Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburger (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 91-92.

[138] Hassan, "The Qurʾanic Perspective," 92-93, 95.

> one of the basic purposes of diversity is to encourage dialogue among different peoples and also that a person's ultimate worth is determined not by what group he or she belongs to but how God-conscious he or she is.[139]

She concludes her explication of the Qurʾānic perspective on religious pluralism by briefly touching upon the importance of tolerance and ethical action.[140]

Hassan's approach to religious difference is clearly an example of the first trend presented in Chapter Three, that is, the prioritization of sameness. Hassan acknowledges difference, but like Engineer she does not mention or contend with any pluralism-ambivalent aspects of the Qurʾānic text. This is especially intriguing in light of the hermeneutical approach and conception of difference that I have outlined in this chapter. Hermeneutically, Hassan does focus on the Qurʾān, but not in a holistic fashion. Conceptually, she reiterates the notions of a shared, universal humanity and *taqwā* as the basis of God's ultimate judgment. These are the first and last components—the bookends—in the conception of difference. Hassan, however, does not grapple with the complexity of the intervening elements, including the purpose of diversity, the implications of that purpose for understanding divine ontology and human anthropology, and the different forms of diversity.

In her writing on sexual difference and gender, Barlas presents religious diversity as an example of the "necessary, and ... necessarily moral-social, function" served by difference. Moreover, she cites *Sūrat al-māʾida*[141] and *Sūrat al-rūm*[142] as evidence of the divine intentionality

---

[139] Hassan, "The Qurʾanic Perspective," 98.

[140] Hassan, "The Qurʾanic Perspective," 99-100.

[141] Excerpt of Qurʾān 5:48 (Note: Barlas incorrectly cites this verse as being 5:51): "... We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about."
لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى الله مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[142] Qurʾān 30:22: "Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. There truly are signs in this for those who know."
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالِمِينَ

of religious, racial and linguistic difference.[143] As divinely-intended, no one of these forms of difference should be eradicated. Barlas, then, discusses *taqwā* as the only basis of hierarchical differentiation in the Qurʾān, stating that the evaluation of *taqwā* aims to "differentiate between belief and unbelief."[144] Although she does not apply the terminology explicitly, what Barlas seems to imply in the juxtaposition of these two observations is that religions are divinely ordained forms of 'lateral' difference, whereas belief and unbelief are hierarchal differentiations that do not automatically correspond with specific religions. Just as hierarchical differentiation is not carried out on the basis of sexual difference—or linguistic and racial difference—neither is it carried out on the basis of religious difference. *Taqwā*, hence, becomes a characteristic that does not automatically reside within one religion only.

This depiction of difference is mostly reiterated in her work on Islamic universalism, tolerance and religious diversity.[145] Exploring the Qurʾān and the perspectives of al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-ʿArabī, she aims to demonstrate that "the principles of mutual recognition, tolerance, and respect for difference, which are necessary for peace and reconciliation, are integral to Islam."[146] She argues that the Qurʾān does not make any ontological or epistemological distinctions based upon difference and that difference is divinely-intended in order to encourage mutual recognition.[147] Further explicating the purpose of difference, Barlas describes mutual recognition as an ongoing process of dialogue by which individuals gain "full

[143] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 145-146.
[144] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 146.
[145] Asma Barlas, "Reviving Islamic Universalism: East/s, West/s, and Coexistence" (paper presented at the Conference on Contemporary Islamic Synthesis, Alexandria, Egypt, October 2003), 7. Available online at http://faculty.ithaca.edu/abarlas/.
[146] Barlas, "Reviving Islamic Universalism," 7.
[147] This is an allusion to Qurʾān 49:13. See footnote 131.

self-awareness and moral consciousness."[148] However, she is quick to clarify that "this does not mean that the Other serves as a mere foil for the self against which the self must construct itself oppositionally."[149] Based upon this view of the intentionality and purpose of difference, Barlas concludes that difference is never presented in the Qurʾān as justification for violence.[150] While human fear of both 'distant' ("those who we think are wholly *different* from ourselves") and 'proximate' ("those who we fear are too much *like* ourselves") otherness has led to violence, this is not the Qurʾānic perspective.[151] Even the 'paradigmatic' and 'special' status granted to Islam through the Qurʾānic assertion that Islam is the "culmination and perfection of religion"[152] does not legitimate violence towards other religions.

Barlas' reflections on religious diversity are more extensive and complex than those presented by Hassan. Especially in reference to the construction of 'self' and 'other,' Barlas demonstrates unique insight into the potential danger of the 'self' being defined in opposition to, rather than in dynamic relation with, the 'other.' Other aspects of Barlas' approach, however, reduce complexity. The first is her primary concern to demonstrate that Islam is consistent with tolerance and that Islam does not advocate violence on the basis of religious difference. These are laudable aims, but tolerance and lack of violence are not the same as a positive valuation of difference. Barlas intends to affirm difference as purposeful and valuable in and of itself, but her primary focus on tolerance does not compel her to thoroughly unpack

---

[148] Asma Barlas, "Hearing the Word, as a Muslim: Thirteen Passages of the Qurʾān and Religious Difference" (paper presented at Cornell University Vespers, November 2007), 6. Available online at http://faculty.ithaca.edu/abarlas/.
[149] Barlas, "Reviving Islamic Universalism," 8.
[150] Barlas, "Reviving Islamic Universalism," 9.
[151] Barlas, "Hearing the Word," 2.
[152] Barlas, "Hearing the Word," 6; Barlas, "Reviving Islamic Universalism," 8. See is referring to Qurʾān 5:3 (excerpt): "... Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion *al-islām* (total devotion to God) ... "
... الْيَوْمَ يَئِسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن دِينِكُمْ فَلاَ تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الإِسْلاَمَ دِينًا...

the theological implications of purposeful and valuable difference. This is evident, for example, in the fact that she does not at all challenge the depiction of Islam as the perfection and culmination of all revelation. Rather, she simply asserts that this belief should not be used a license for violence or intolerance. As exemplified by Legenhausen, it is possible to construct a model of religious difference that integrates a belief in the perfection of Islam and also in the (limited) value of other religions. Barlas, however, does not attempt to explicitly outline such a model.

6. Conclusion

It is my contention that the hermeneutical approach and complex conception of sexual difference outlined by Wadud, Barlas and Hassan is capable of revealing unique and pivotal insights into religious difference. While this contention is certainly not confirmed by the preceding overview of their own writings on religious diversity, it is my goal to co-opt their hermeneutical approach and their conception of difference as the foundation of a new model of religious pluralism: a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. While I will undertake the articulation of this theology in Part Three of this study, it is helpful to conclude this chapter by highlighting some basic trajectories of analysis and investigation suggested by Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān's conception of sexual difference.

As with the discussion of sexual difference, in the discussion of religious difference, a difference-only approach that emphasizes the oppositional definition of bounded groups will be deemed inadequate. The attempt to understand religious difference will begin by focusing on and understanding the complexity of human sameness, or theological anthropology. However, a focus on sameness alone will be seen as equally inadequate due to its neglect of

vital differences—especially in terms of the social and practical manifestations of religion—and its attempt to present a particular norm as an all-inclusive universal norm. As with non-reductive efforts, such as those of Shah-Kazemi and Legenhausen, both sameness and difference will be affirmed, but a new approach to understanding the connection between the two—an alternative to both isolation and hierarchal evaluation—will be essential. This new approach will emerge in part from an attempt to discriminate between various genres of religious difference; from an examination of the purpose and value of divinely-intended religious difference; and from a comparative examination of the Qur'ānic discourse on religious difference, including the concept of *taqwā*, in relation to the reified conception of religion.

These embryonic observations confirm that there are elements from these scholars' conception of sexual difference that can be generalized and connected to a novel, complex and integrated conception of religious difference. Any attempt to do so, however, must acknowledge that the categories of sexual difference and religious difference are not wholly of the same genre;[153] the concept of religion cannot simply be 'plugged-in' or substituted for biological sex. Therefore, the question of what specific aspects and theories can appropriately be extended to the topic of religious pluralism must be further explored. In an effort to do so, in the following chapter I will critically and comparatively explore the more extensive corpus of writings by women scholars from other religious traditions on the topics of religious diversity, religious pluralism, and theology of religions.

[153] For example, it is possible to argue that biological sex is given at the time of creation, whereas religious difference develops later and involves some element of choice. This being said, choice in religion may be more a theoretical postulate than a reality, as most people retain the religion of their parents. Religion, thus, assumes an inherited dimension that complexifies any discussion of religion as individually chosen.

Chapter Five

From Sexual Difference to Religious Difference: Conceptual Extensions from Feminist Theological Approaches to Religious Difference

1. Introduction

While it remains true that "the distinct perspective of feminist thought has not yet fully engaged the issues of religious pluralism,"[1] in the last three decades a small number of feminist theologians have made important contributions to the field of theology of religions. These feminist theologians have not simply taken up religious difference as a novel and distinct subject matter; rather, they have approached theology of religions as another example of a discourse in which the universalization of a particular norm has resulted in the oppression and marginalization of individuals and groups that do not conform to that norm. The unique—albeit in many cases emergent—perspectives manifest in their contributions are the direct result of a conscious endeavor to apply the foundational theories and insights of their feminist reflections on sexual difference, gender, and androcentrism to the topic of religious difference.

It is this conscious endeavor to extend conceptual insights to religious difference that makes their contributions of great value to the current study. Of particular relevance are their critiques of the standard typologies of theology of religions, their desire to affirm particularity without necessarily resorting to hierarchical evaluation, and their incorporation of identity theory into the discussion of religious diversity. These various components not only resonate

[1] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 19, no 2 (Fall 2003): 5-24, here 5.

with the basic model I outlined at the end of Chapter Four, but they also offer insights into how to overcome the shortcomings I highlighted in respect to contemporary Islamic approaches to religious difference in Chapter Three.

For those reasons, in this chapter, I will survey feminist contributions to theology of religions with the goal of identifying various elements that are consistent with and thus capable of guiding the extension of the conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. Since the feminist theologians I survey in this chapter come from various religious traditions, it is necessary to explore their perspectives critically and comparatively—rather than adopt them *in toto*—in order to avoid flattening out "fundamental epistemic differences"[2] or universalizing a particular feminist theological perspective to all women.[3]

I will begin with a brief overview of some core methodologies, sources and norms of feminist theology, as articulated by the Christian feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether. While Ruether's overview is necessarily particular—something which she explicitly acknowledges[4]—it nevertheless justifies the central task of this chapter. Ruether's overview of feminist theological insights on sexual difference demonstrates meaningful overlap with the

[2] Barlas, "Four Stages of Denial," 4.
[3] This concern was discussed in the preceding chapter in reference to Muslim women scholars' reticence to adopt the label feminism. It has also been broached by others who highlight the lack of cultural and religious diversity within feminist theology. See Kwok Pui-Lan, "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology,* ed. Susan Parsons (New York: Cambridge University, 2002); Rita Gross and respondents, "Roundtable Discussion: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 73-131; Rita Gross, "Where Have We Been? Where Do We Need to Go?: Women's Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (New York: Continuum, 2005), 17-27. One result of critiques and concerns related to lack of diversity and the universalization of a middle-class, white, Euro-American female norm has been the emergence of various specified forms of theology, including womanist theology, *mujerista* theology and, perhaps even, the *Muslima* theology I am constructing. For more information—including excerpts from representative scholars—on these various forms, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Growing Pluralism, New Dialogue," in *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 425-468; McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 64-66.
[4] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 21.

theological approaches and concerns of Muslim women interpreters. If there is meaningful overlap in reference to sexual difference, then potentially there will be meaningful overlap in reference to religious difference as well.

I will then explore the manner in which various feminist theologians, including Ruether, have attempted to extend their methodologies, sources and norms to the topic of religious diversity, highlighting dominant critiques of standard approaches and unique insights that stem directly from their reflections on sexual difference. I will conclude by identifying a selection of insights that are apt for extending the conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters as articulated in Chapter Four and thus forming the basis of a *Muslima* theology of religious difference.

2. A Working Paradigm of Feminist Theology: Rosemary Radford Ruether

In *Sexism and God-talk*, Rosemary Radford Ruether presents a lucid overview of core methodologies, sources, and norms of Christian feminist theology. As already indicated, Ruether explicitly acknowledges the particularity of her articulation of feminist theology. Referring to it as *a* feminist theology, rather than *the* feminist theology, she argues that there can never be a final and definitive version.[5] Ruether recognizes that different religions and different cultural groups will create other paradigms of feminist theology, but she nonetheless hopes that her general model can serve as a working paradigm to stimulate dialogue amidst diversity. It is in light of her aspiration for such and her contributions to the field of theology

[5] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 21. See also Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah," 76-77.

of religions that, in this section, I bring her specific working paradigm into dialogue with the conception of sexual difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān.[6]

Ruether defines feminist theology as an approach that aims to apply feminist critiques and reconstructions of gender to theological discussions.[7] On the critical level, this involves questioning and challenging theological formulations that present justifications for male dominance and female subordination. Such theological formulations, according to Ruether, include

> exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society, or that women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus sin by rejecting subordination.[8]

Feminist theology, however, is not only concerned with critiquing and deconstructing dominant theological formulations. It also has the constructive aim of formulating egalitarian and gender-inclusive versions of "the basic symbols of God, humanity, male and female, creation, sin and redemption, and the church."[9] This reconstruction involves reclaiming and developing egalitarian themes within the tradition, and can only be effective when theological symbols are recognized to be "socially constructed, rather than eternally and unchangeably disclosed from beyond."[10]

---

[6] While I have chosen to focus of Rosemary Radford Ruether due to her work on feminist theology and her work on theology of religions, there are many other prominent feminist theologians with whom it would be intriguing to compare the methods and views of Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. For example, see Hidayatullah, "Inspiration and Struggle," 162-170; Hidayatullah, "Women Trustees of Allah"; Anne Sofie Roald, "Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic Sources: Muslim Feminist Theology in the Light of the Christian Tradition of Feminist Thought," in *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations,* edited by Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 17-44.

[7] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," in Parsons, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, 3.

[8] Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," 3.

[9] Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," 4.

[10] Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology," 4.

Although the targets of critique and the sources of development differ, Muslim women interpreters are similarly engaged in the processes of criticizing, deconstructing, and reconstructing theological formulations and interpretations.[11] However, in order to claim authority and in line with their view of the Qurʾānic text, Muslim women interpreters typically position their reconstructive efforts as an 'uncovering' or 'reiteration' of what is actually present in the text but has been obscured through patriarchal interpretation. Another interesting divergence in these processes is the degree to which Muslim women interpreters do—or do not—explicitly bring feminist theories to bear on theology and interpretation. Whereas Barlas is quite explicit and detailed in her use of theoretical insights related to sex and gender,[12] Wadud and Hassan premise their critiques primarily upon a negative evaluation of social oppression. Barlas, of course, recognizes this oppression as well, but she is more specific about the underlying assumptions and structures of oppression. The reticence of some Muslim women interpreters to explicitly engage feminist theory is, not surprisingly, an extension of the ambivalent relationship between Islam and feminism described in Chapter Four.

Ruether further explains the social-construction of theological formulations and symbols by highlighting the centrality of human experience in the process of interpretation. While Ruether maintains that the role of human experience has been downplayed in classical theologies, she contends that human experience has always been and will always be the "starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle."[13] In drawing attention to the role of experience in interpretation, feminist theology exposes the fact that, despite the facade

[11] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 68.
[12] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 129-133.
[13] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 12.

of objectivity, classical theology has been based upon male experience not universal human experience.[14]

The hermeneutical role of human experience also indicates that every revelatory experience gains meaning only through social mediation. Mediation takes place in specific social and cultural settings; "[t]he hand of the divine does not write on a cultural *tabula rasa*."[15] Even though meaning-producing mediation is an ongoing process, it has historically been subjected to channeling and control, through which a dominant group identifies a 'correct' interpretation and marginalizes and suppresses all other interpretations.[16] According to Ruether, this is the process whereby an orthodox interpretation and a canon are established. Human experience, however, continues to play a role despite the reification of the tradition; the institutionalized orthodoxy and canon remain 'vital' as long as they continue to resonate with contemporary human experience. When resonance dwindles or ceases, a "crisis of tradition" ensues: "[r]eligious traditions fall into crisis when the received interpretations of the redemptive paradigms contradict experience in significant ways."[17]

Ruether's emphasis on human experience and social mediation aligns well with the stress Wadud, Barlas and Hassan place upon context and ongoing interpretation. Wadud, for instance, discusses the interplay between 'prior text' (the cultural-situatedness of an interpreter) and the text (the Qurʾān) in order to highlight the active role of the interpreter and the interpreter's context in the process of ascribing meaning to revelation.[18] Barlas similarly invokes the concept of polysemy to argue that interpretation of revelation takes

[14] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 13. See also McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 71.
[15] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 14.
[16] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 14. See also McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 67, 71.
[17] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 16.
[18] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 1.

place within and in relation to context.[19] It is an ongoing process, despite the rhetoric of monosemy and monovalency that has periodically characterized Islamic discourse. In order to shed light on these tendencies, Barlas carries out an extensive multi-textual examination; she explores the intra-textual elements of the Qurʾān, the inter-textual relationship of the Qurʾān to other Islamic sources, and extra-textual relationships in socio-political contexts.[20] Furthermore, in adopting the hermeneutical approach of Fazlur Rahman, these Muslim women interpreters again acknowledge that all revelation occurs within a specific context and that in order for the revelation to retain its universal relevancy it must be recontextualized within each new context.[21] It is precisely when recontextualization does not take place that the relevancy is jeopardized. While they do not utilize the terminology of "crisis," it is in fact a fitting description.

Ruether contends that crises of tradition can be experienced at various levels and to various degrees and, thus, can evoke various responses.[22] The least radical level results in exegetical criticism, in which the traditional methods of transmitting knowledge are affirmed but new interpretations are formulated. Ruether describes the second type of crisis as more drastic in that it depicts institutional structures as corrupt. As a result, it aims to go behind the historical tradition in order to access the authentic original revelation, original founder, and early stages of tradition:

[19] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 33.
[20] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 31, 63.
[21] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 5.
[22] For an overview of specific Christian feminist strategies in respect to Biblical interpretation, see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics," in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 3-40. Schüssler Fiorenza details four feminist approaches, including The Women's Bible, a neo-orthodox model of feminist interpretation, a feminist sociology of knowledge model, and a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation.

> The original revelation, and the foundational stages of its formulation, are not challenged but held as all the more authoritative to set them as normative against later traditions.[23]

While Ruether astutely recognizes that this "return to origins" is impossible, she presents it as a more comprehensive strategy for opening up interpretative possibilities in an effort to account for contemporary experience. The third type of crisis—the most radical—deems the entire religious heritage, including the original revelation and founder, corrupt and thus moves outside of the religious heritage in order to seek alternative sources of truth.[24]

Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan are most aligned with Ruether's second type of response to crisis. It is clear that they have prioritized the original revelation and that they are seeking to reinterpret that revelation in order to bypass the historical legacy of patriarchal and androcentric interpretation. They have set the Qurʾān as the standard against which all secondary sources and exegetical efforts must be judged. They do, however, not completely dismiss the traditional methods, and therefore there is some overlap with the first type of response as well. The primary method of *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān*, for example, is a classical methodology that has been employed throughout Islamic history, although with divergent conclusions. While other Muslim women have certainly taken the third route—deeming the entire tradition to be corrupt—this is not the approach of Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan.

One interesting observation—which Ruether does not mention but with which she may agree—is that there is another response to crisis, a response often voiced by those interested in maintaining the established tradition despite the experience of crisis. In this response, the crisis is attributed to deviation or degradation in the social or cultural context. The cause of crisis is not seen as a failure to socially mediate revelation and theological formulations, but

[23] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 17.
[24] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 17.

rather the crisis is caused by an increasing gulf between 'true' theological formulations and a 'corrupt' society. The burden in such a scenario falls on society, not theology; society must be brought back in line with the formulations and interpretations. Neither the formulations or nor the interpretations need to be changed. This perspective has certainly been voiced within the Islamic tradition as an outcome of the pervasive tendency to equate universal relevance with interpretative monovalency. If only one interpretation is correct, then only one interpretation is required regardless of time or context. Therefore, if there is tension between the interpretation and the context, it must be due to a problem in the context. While this response to crisis does not seem to be favored by most feminist theologians or Muslim women interpreters, it is a response with which they must contend in exerting their interpretative authority.

Another key feature in Ruether's articulation of feminist theology is her assertion that the critical principle of feminist theology is the "the promotion of the full humanity of women":

> Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.[25]

This critical principle is primarily based upon Ruether's assessment of the implications of androcentrism and the oppression of women for the pivotal theological paradigm of *imago dei*.[26] When men are presented as the norm of authentic humanity—as the true or complete *imago dei*—women are subjected to scapegoating and marginalization. With scapegoating, women are negatively evaluated as the oppositional inverse of the ideal male norm. With

[25] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 18-19.
[26] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 19.

marginalization, women are presented as an incomplete or inferior version of the ideal male norm. For Ruether, both depictions distort and contradict the theological paradigm of *imago dei*, and *imago dei* becomes an instrument of sin, rather than something which discloses the divine or grace.[27] Ruether, however, is quick to indicate that the same sort of distortion or corruption would result from a simple reversal of norms, that is, from presenting women as the ideal. Hence, the goal is to search for a more inclusive—yet not homogenizing—depiction of universal humanity.[28]

Promotion of the full humanity of women is undoubtedly the objective of Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan as well. Hassan, for example, criticizes traditions that depict women as being created from and for man and as being responsible for the Fall.[29] In dismissing these traditions due to conflict with the Qurʾān, she aims to re-present women as much more than derivative, secondary, or blameworthy. In a move similar to Ruether's description of scapegoating and marginalization, Barlas argues against dualistic depictions of men and women, and bifurcated depictions of women as being equal to men morally but not socially.[30]

While *imago dei* is a distinctively Christian theological paradigm, Muslim women interpreters also attempt to connect views of women's status with conceptualizations of the divine. Barlas, for example, contends that interpretations that promote injustice or patriarchy not only depict women, and so affect them, negatively, but they also misrepresent God, who is described in the Qurʾān as the most just and the incomparable.[31] This strategy underscores the

[27] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 19. Elizabeth Johnson draws a similar parallel when she argues that exclusive, literal and patriarchal speech about God not only negatively impacts women but also negatively impacts the conception of the divine and divine mystery: "Inauthentic ways of treating other human beings go hand-in-glove with falsifications of the idea of God." (Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* [New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002], 36.)
[28] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 20.
[29] Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 44.
[30] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 129, 148.
[31] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 13.

importance of assessing the validity of interpretations and theological paradigms in light of their implications and interrelationships with other aspects of the theological worldview.

Based upon this brief 'dialogue' between Ruether's working paradigm of Christian feminist theology and Muslim women interpreters' conceptualization of difference, it is apparent that there is significant convergence between the two approaches. Therefore, in an effort to develop the model of religious difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters, it is helpful to explore how Ruether and other feminist theologians have extended their approaches to the topics of religious pluralism and theology of religions.

3. Theology of Religions: Feminist Theological Critiques & Contributions

Ruether's views on religious diversity grow directly out of her reflections on sexual and gender difference. She argues that the rejection of androcentrism—the presentation of a particular human norm as a universal human norm—necessitates the criticism of "all other forms of chauvinism," including the presentation of Christians as the norm of humanity.[32] She clarifies by stating,

> This is not a question of sameness but of recognition of value, which at the same time affirms genuine variety and particularity. It reaches for a new mode of relationship, neither a hierarchical model that diminishes the potential of the 'other' nor an 'equality' defined by a ruling norm drawn from the dominant groups; rather a mutuality that allows us to affirm different ways of being.[33]

Just as Ruether contends that men are not the norm for all of humanity, she similarly argues that Judeo-Christian theological reflections do not have an automatically privileged relation to God, truth or authentic humanity.[34] This does not mean that all theological reflections or

[32] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 20.
[33] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 20.
[34] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 21.

religions are the same—difference as well as sameness is important—but that the norms are not drawn from one tradition.

Exploring various Jewish and Christian perspectives on universalism and particularism, Ruether further opines that the view that one religion has "a monopoly on religious truth is an outrageous and absurd religious chauvinism."[35] In contrast to this exclusive view, Ruether posits a universal Divine Being, and the existence of true revelation and a true relationship with the Divine in all religions. Feminism's specific challenge to the notion of a universal faith, according to Ruether, is its illumination of a history of male-domination, marginalization of women, and "pervasive androcentrism"[36] within virtually all religious traditions. In light of this history and the resultant exclusion of women "from defining their meaning or being recognized as fonts of authority for the traditions,"[37] feminists simultaneously offer an incisive critique and search for more inclusive and representative alternatives. Similar to her general overview of feminist theology, Ruether notes that the search for alternatives may take many forms but can be divided into two primary trends. First is the search within the tradition for "critical perspectives by which to open up more inclusive ways of developing the tradition itself."[38] The second trend is the creation of new models. Noting the hostility with which many retrievals have been met, she concludes that the second trend is the only "sufficient" response:

> Feminist theology cannot just rely on exegesis of past tradition, however ingeniously redefined to appear inclusive. It is engaged in a primal re-encounter

[35] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Particularism and Universalism in the Search for Truth" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987), 141.
[36] Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 144.
[37] Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 143.
[38] Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 144.

> with divine reality and, in this re-encounter, new stories will grow and be told as new foundations of our identity.[39]

Therefore, she encourages the writing of "new stories," the creation of a "new feminist midrash," and the development of inter-feminist dialogue.[40]

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki also discusses universal norms, arguing that the identification and application of norms, when "combined with power, allows and invites exploitation" and distorts the perspectives of those falling outside of the norm.[41] This general depiction of normativeness applies to religion as well, and Suchocki contends that universalization of religious norms leads to judgment, oppression, and injustice. In her view, feminists cannot accept these outcomes and therefore they must "radically affirm religious pluralism."[42] Acceptance of religious pluralism by feminists, however, does not mean relativism. While feminists "accept the uniqueness and self-naming quality of each religion,"[43] they nevertheless distinguish between religions by employing the ethical criterion of justice. The invocation of justice is tied to another key element of her feminist perspective on religious pluralism: the notion that discussions of religious diversity and justice should be premised upon ethical, rather than ideological grounds.[44] For Suchocki, justice is a necessary criterion as "[t]he norm for judging the value of an alternative form ... could not simply be doctrinal, but historical and ethical."[45]

---

[39] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4, 75th Anniversary Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (December 1985): 703-713, here 710.
[40] Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 147.
[41] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective" in Hick and Knitter, *Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 149.
[42] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 149.
[43] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 150.
[44] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 150, 158.
[45] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 155.

Perhaps Suchocki's most significant contribution, however, is her discussion of the correlation between "religious imperialism and sexism."[46] She observes that feminists have critiqued sexism on two accounts: the universalization of male experience and the attribution of negative or problematic qualities to women. She equates these two forms with religious inclusivism, in which a religious norm—for example, Christ—is extended to all religions, and religious exclusivism, in which "reprehensible qualities" are assigned to other religions and their value is negated entirely.[47] This parallel, for Suchocki, confirms her opinion that feminists must necessarily affirm religious pluralism.

In *Standing Again at Sinai*,[48] Judith Plaskow is primarily concerned with articulating a feminist perspective on Judaism. Couched in this broader examination, however, is a discussion of the general manner in which Judaism approaches difference. Plaskow argues that Judaism "valorizes" difference, assessing it in a dualistic and hierarchical manner.[49] For Jewish females, this results in their depiction as "both other and inferior."[50] Plaskow, echoing Suchocki, equates the internal depiction of women with the external distinction between Jew and non-Jew.[51] Here, the concept of "chosenness" takes center stage, defining and valuing all other religions in terms of Judaism. From these insights, Plaskow advocates a two-pronged hermeneutic of suspicion and remembrance,[52] which is capable of fostering a "thorough reconceptualization of the way that difference is understood and portrayed"[53] within Judaism. "Chosenness" must be replaced with "distinctiveness," in which hierarchical dualisms are

[46] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 150.
[47] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 153.
[48] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).
[49] Michael Oppenheim, "Feminism, Jewish Philosophy, and Religious Pluralism," *Modern Judaism* 16, no. 2 (May 1996): 150.
[50] Oppenheim, "Feminism," 150.
[51] Plaskow, *Standing Again*, 96.
[52] Plaskow, *Standing Again*, 13-14.
[53] Oppenheim, "Feminism," 151.

absent.[54] Plaskow, drawing connections between "chosenness" and the traditional Jewish conception of God, advocates a corrective employment of "a plurality of images for God" in order to give voice to those who have been excluded, and a simultaneous recognition of the limitations of all human language about God.[55]

Concerned with the equally "shaky foundations" of exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist mainstream Christian approaches to theology of religions, Kate McCarthy asserts that feminist theology offers "exciting and timely" resources for developing a new approach.[56] McCarthy identifies the central challenge of religious pluralism as the ability to encounter the otherness of religious others without subsuming that otherness or sacrificing the distinctiveness of one's own religious identity.[57]

In response to this challenge, feminist theology and women's experience offer three primary resources. The first is women's first-hand experience of otherness; women have been the 'other' within religious and interpretative communities. While this has not always been a positive experience, feminist theologians have used their sensitivity to particularities to resist the "totalizing" impulses of most mainstream theology. The second resource is plurality of social location. McCarthy here draws upon the idea that women have a "consciously plural identity;" they inhabit multiple social locations in multiple communities.[58] While such plurality is not unique to women—in fact it is a condition of all human experience—women are especially aware of particularity, multiplicity, and the impossibility of a universal perspective. As a result, feminist theologians have not attempted to subsume difference under a universal

[54] Plaskow, *Standing Again*, 105.
[55] Plaskow, *Standing Again*, 154.
[56] Kate McCarthy, "Women's Experience as a Hermeneutical Key to a Christian Theology of Religions," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 6, no. 2 (1996): 163.
[57] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 165.
[58] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 165-166.

norm, but rather to affirm difference, to live the "riddles of difference" by holding together the plurality of identities in "dynamic and creative tension."[59] The third resource that McCarthy highlights is embodied spirituality, the reliance on bodily experience and analogical theology to imagine possibilities beyond formal theological doctrine.[60]

After indicating these three potential resources, McCarthy endeavors to highlight their theological implications in reference to religious pluralism. The first implication relates to the "hermeneutical audacity" of feminist theologians, who approach scripture and tradition in a highly critical and selective manner.[61] This methodological approach, McCarthy contends, is well-suited to opening up new avenues—to thinking the unthinkable—in theology of religions. The second implication relates to the doctrine of God. Describing feminist conceptions of God as relational, fluid, and integrated—rather than reified and static—she envisions an alternative to both relativism and exclusivism, an alternative that "can condemn as error that which isolates and breaks away from such relationality but endorse and indeed depend upon diverse manifestations of the divine relationship."[62] The final implication McCarthy underscores is the reorientation of Christology towards "life-centered" soteriology rather than metaphysical questions. This orientation permits the depiction of dialogue and cooperation with other religions in the quest for a just society as salvific.

Like McCarthy, Ursula King highlights the parallel between the "otherness" of women and the "otherness" of religious traditions, between the "full and equal participation of women

[59] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 167.
[60] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 167-168.
[61] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 168-169.
[62] McCarthy, "Women's Experience," 170-171.

and that of the full and equal dignity and respect accorded to all religions."[63] She also discusses the "marginalization, invisibility and exclusion of women" in the general discussion of religious pluralism, as well as in interreligious dialogue: "apart from a few, rare exceptions, feminism remains a missing dimension."[64] Despite this lack of representation, King argues that "the challenge of feminism ... may also develop into a theological challenge if feminist thinkers scrutinize the currently used categories in the theology of religions."[65] These categories—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—lack nuance and are

> much too narrow, static and insufficiently differentiated to capture the organic, fluid and dynamic reality of religion ... nor ... the subtleties and existential commitment of faith.[66]

Moreover, King contends that the categories are thoroughly androcentric in that they are intended to be universally and comprehensively applicable. Theoretical analysis of these categories and other linguistic and conceptual aspects of theology of religions, however, is something which feminist theologians have widely neglected. King encourages such investigation, arguing that the inclusion of feminist perspectives and voices will necessitate "radical political and theological transformation" and potentially foster "fuller disclosure of the powers of the Spirit whose oneness embraces and transcends all differences."[67]

In her work focused explicitly on the question of feminist theology's relationship to religious diversity, Rita Gross highlights three interconnected issues: a lack of religious diversity within feminist theology; a lack of an articulated theology of religious diversity in

[63] Ursula King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions," in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, ed. John D'Arcy May (Herndon, VA: Cassell/Wellington House, 1998), 40-58, here 45.
[64] King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension," 42-43.
[65] King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension," 46.
[66] King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension," 46-47.
[67] King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension," 52-53.

feminist theology; and a lack of feminist participation in interreligious dialogue.[68] In response to the question of what feminism can bring to the development of theologies of religions, Gross specifies two trajectories: the ethical necessity of inclusivity, that is, the 'hearing' of heretofore excluded voices; and the epistemological quest to 'widen the canon,' that is, "rejecting the binding authority of the past and ... searching for new traditions."[69] Ethically, she believes that feminists must inevitably accept religious pluralism over exclusivism and inclusivism: "[f]or a feminist theology of religions, the only suitable candidate among these options is the pluralist position."[70] Having suffered exclusion, it is "inconceivable" for a feminist to exclude others.[71] In this, Gross confirms the parallel between sexism and religious exclusivism; for her, that fact that

> exclusive truth claims in religion function as the religious equivalent of biased statements regarding race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or culture has not been noted, discussed, or condemned by many theologians.[72]

The epistemological realm, however, presents a greater challenge in its focus on learning *about* and *from* other religions. Here, Gross introduces the concept of the "comparative mirror," which critically reveals strengths and weaknesses in our own tradition and presents us with alternatives—a wider canon—that would be difficult to arrive at solely within the context of our own religious traditions.[73]

---

[68] Rita Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," in Parsons, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, 61.
[69] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 63.
[70] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 65.
[71] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 65.
[72] Rita Gross, "Feminist Theology: Religiously Diverse Neighborhood or Christian Ghetto?," in "Roundtable Discussion: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 73-131, here 77.
[73] Gross, "Feminist Theology: Religiously Diverse," 67-68.

In more recent work, Gross utilizes the Buddhist metaphor of 'fingers pointing to the moon' to emphasize the fact that "[r]eligious teachings are not ultimate or absolute truth."[74] She also reiterates Suchocki's view that ethical considerations are "far more important than theological doctrines"[75] and that "theologies of pluralism should focus on questions of ethics … not on questions of metaphysics."[76] For Gross, difference—including the existence of conflicting truth claims—is unproblematic in and of itself; difference is only problematized when it assumes the unethical form of imposition.[77]

The most complex and extensive feminist discussion of religious pluralism comes from Jeannine Hill Fletcher in her book *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism.*[78] Searching for theological resources with which to formulate a Christian conception of other religions, Hill Fletcher highlights a central—and "creative"[79]—tension in Christian thought between making affirmations about the divine and holding that God is ultimately incomprehensible, between "God as known and unknown, God as hidden and revealed, God as spoken and unspoken."[80] Following Karl Rahner, in reference to incomprehensibility, she advocates an understanding of divine mystery as "overabundance" rather than "absence."[81] This forms her starting point in reflecting on religious diversity and leads her to argue that other religions may "have insights to be affirmed of this mysterious overabundance as well."[82]

---

[74] Rita Gross, "Excuse Me, but What's the Question?," in Knitter, *Myth*, 83.
[75] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 66.
[76] Gross, "Excuse Me," 85.
[77] Gross, "Excuse Me," 87.
[78] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly On Salvation?: A Feminist Approach To Religious Pluralism* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005).
[79] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 15.
[80] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 7.
[81] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 10. For more on Hill Fletcher's perspective on Karl Rahner as a theological resource for religious pluralism, see Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Karl Rahner's Principles of Ecumenism and Contemporary Religious Pluralism," in *Theology and the Social Sciences*, The Annual Publication of the College Theological Society, 46, ed. Michael Horace Barnes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 181-194.
[82] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 14.

While no religion—not even Christianity—captures the whole of the divine reality, each may communicate "something real."[83] Hill Fletcher, however, clearly asserts that both affirmation and incomprehensibility are vital; "the tradition of affirmations must be held in balance with the tradition of incomprehensibility."[84] This notion of balance is precisely what preserves the "creative tension," a tension that works to "deepen and continue the eternal process of coming to know God."[85] Hill Fletcher contends that historically this tension has been diffused through a disproportionate emphasis on affirmation, or an assertion of the particularities of "God's revelation in Jesus Christ and salvation as part of that revelation."[86]

Turning to contemporary Christian theologies of religions, Hill Fletcher outlines three criteria for a Christian theology of religious pluralism: it must offer strategies for communication across and among faiths; it must maintain continuity with the affirmed tradition in Jesus; and it must be attentive to material and practical consequences.[87] Based on these criteria, she argues that the paradigm of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism is "tired" and thus the "discourse on religious pluralism seems to be in desperate need of fresh insights and alternative ways of thinking in order to keep the conversation moving in new directions."[88] Standard typologies and approaches to theologies of religions have reached an "impasse of sameness and difference."[89]

Specifically, Hill Fletcher describes exclusivism as promoting an affirmation-heavy, "God's eye view" that, while not directly tied to physical violence, can foster antagonism and discourage communication; "[s]omeone who holds an exclusivist position need not listen to

[83] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 15.
[84] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 19.
[85] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 20.
[86] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 20.
[87] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 52.
[88] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 7.
[89] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 51-81.

nor learn from his/her neighbor of another faith."[90] Inclusivism embraces the notion of incomprehensibility absent in exclusivism, but nonetheless problematically extends a Christian norm to all religions. This limits blatant dismissal of other traditions but simultaneously impedes the sincere motivation to learn about the "distinctive affirmations" of religious others.[91] Hill Fletcher critiques pluralism for explicitly seeking sameness, while implicitly privileging Christian ideals and norms. As such, in pluralism, "the distinctiveness of any given community is dissolved under the now universalized qualities of singular human fulfillment,"[92] that is, salvation.

In addition to critiquing the standard tripartite typology as a quest for sameness, she also sees significant shortcomings in those approaches, for example George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model and S. Mark Heim's model of multiple salvations, which emphasize difference in this world and in the eschaton.[93] Such models depict religions as incommensurable and not only discourage communication among religions but promote the idea that true understanding is impossible.[94] In summary, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and the particularism of Lindbeck and Heim arrive at a stalemate due to the fact that they all function to distance otherness.[95] Exclusivism and particularism defend difference but promote incommensurability, thereby inhibiting the possibility of interconnections across religions. Inclusivism and pluralism highlight sameness, thereby "erasing" otherness and ignoring significant differences.[96]

[90] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 55.
[91] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 62.
[92] Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 9.
[93] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 69-76.
[94] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 74.
[95] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 77.
[96] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 77; Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 10.

Hill Fletcher contends that this impasse is the direct result of a particular conception of Christian identity as collectively shared, wholly distinct from other identities, static, and internally homogeneous.[97] Drawing upon Iris Young's Logic of Identity, she argues that emphasis on a "single identity feature" leads to a fixation with defining static boundaries, with defining in and out, pure and impure.[98] She further expounds upon this conception of identity in reference to Ulrich Beck's "container theory," in which religions are depicted as "facts to be studied" in a taxonomic manner; religions are separated, placed within a limited set of 'containers,' and ordered for comparison.[99] Hill Fletcher states that while inclusivism, pluralism and particularism respectively promote hierarchy, parity and radical difference, they all nonetheless operate on the same conception of religions as distinct and discrete entities.[100] This depiction of identity, however, is a conceptual tool capable only of accounting for total sameness or radical difference, not the actual diversity and dynamic relationships that exist among and within religious groups.

In response to this homogenizing perspective, Hill Fletcher proffers an alternative conception of identity. Drawing on feminist identity theory, she asserts that "our religious identities are always impacted by our social, political, gendered, and sexual identities."[101] Identity, therefore, is not based on one feature nor is it static or homogeneous; it is hybrid and always embedded in a complex web of dynamic, intersecting relations.[102] Hill Fletcher

---

[97] Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 13.
[98] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 84. See also Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1990), 43-46, 98-99; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000) 81-120.
[99] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization: The Making of Modern Religious Identity," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 397-398. See also Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).
[100] Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism," 401.
[101] Hill Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 16.
[102] Hill Fletcher, Monopoly, 87-88, 95-97. The idea of the "web of identity" is drawn from Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Hill Fletcher also utilizes the concept of

reconceives identity as a "verb," not something that is simply ascribed by the label "religion."[103] As a verb, identity "occurs relationally" and is "continually reconstructed in the multiplicity of our interactions."[104] Identity is not constructed abstractly in isolation, and it is never fixed. Rather, identity is formed precisely at the points of interaction with diversity; identity is formed at the contact zones of fluid cultural traffic that engender not static religious identities over against one another, but hybridities that dissolve the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.[105]

Consequently, hybridity also challenges the 'logic of identity' and 'container theory' by demonstrating that borders and boundaries between the discrete religions are an imposed theoretical construction. Borders are actually dynamic and in flux, and as a result religious homogeneity—or purity—is an illusion.[106] This depiction destabilizes the two central emphases on "sameness universalism" or "hierarchical otherness" that Hill Fletcher identified in relation to categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and particularism.[107] As an alternative, Hill Fletcher depicts persons and religious identities as "interwoven" across the religions.[108]

Based on this reconceptualization of identity, Hill Fletcher contends that religious distinctiveness or difference is not an insurmountable obstacle which prevents communication, understanding or cooperative action.[109] On the contrary, the "overlap in our webs of identity" creates relationships in which we can 'retell' and 'reweave' our various

---

relationality when discussing Christology. See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Christology between Identity and Difference: On Behalf of a World in Need," in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, ed. Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 80-83.

[103] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 96.
[104] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 96
[105] Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism," 407.
[106] Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism," 405.
[107] Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism," 408.
[108] Hill Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism," 409; Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 97.
[109] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 109-110.

stories.[110] Drawing on her Christian story, for example, Hill Fletcher envisions Jesus as a model for meaningful relationships, for solidarity in particularity, a model for loving the "neighbor-who-is-other" without erasing otherness.[111] Diversity, thus, becomes a gift, an opportunity to perpetuate our "never-ending coming to know God."[112] Diversity should not be erased or distanced. It should be valued for its transformative potential, its illumination of the complexity and overabundance of God, and its enabling of us to partake in the complex Divine mystery.

Another unique perspective on theology of religions comes from Kwok Pui-Lan, who argues that the field must be examined in relation to contemporary political interests and "American imperialism."[113] Echoing the views of Hill Fletcher, Kwok criticizes the three major paradigms—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—of theology of religions as all being based—explicitly or implicitly—upon Christian norms. She examines pluralism in greater depth, focusing specifically on the models proposed by John Hick, George Lindbeck, and feminist theologians.[114] Hick's pluralism, according to Kwok, is based upon liberal, Western political ideals and is patronizing in the manner which it glosses over religious differences.[115] Kwok connects Lindbeck's emphasis on incommensurable difference with American foreign policy and 'clash of civilizations' rhetoric. She also notes that Lindbeck presents a view of

[110] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 129, 124.
[111] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 129.
[112] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 134, 136.
[113] Kwok Pui-lan, "Beyond Pluralism: Toward a Postcolonial Theology of Religious Difference," in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 186-208, here 197.
[114] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 199-201. See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion;* George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). The works of feminist theologians that she references are the same ones that I have cited throughout this section.
[115] A similar critique of Hick is expressed by Muhammad Legenhausen. See Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, 107-115.

religion as "narrowly constructed and tightly bound."[116] Referring to feminist theologians—including McCarthy, King, and Gross—she praises their intentions, but argues that they largely speak from a "white context" and therefore ignore contributions from other feminist theologians throughout the world.[117]

On a more general level, Kwok states that it is vital to scrutinize two underlying assumptions that enable pluralistic models of theology of religion: "an uncritical use of the category of 'religion' and the problematic construction of 'world religions.'"[118] These two assumptions are ideological constructions of Western and Christian thought. As such, they are impositions upon other religious traditions, impositions that impede Western comprehension of other faiths and that can be employed to "preserve the status quo and camouflage the real differences."[119]

As an alternative to pluralism, Kwok advocates the development of a "postcolonial theology of religious difference" that questions the utility of the reified and "bounded" conception of religion and the possibility of treating religion as a separate category of human existence.[120] A postcolonial theology of religious difference, Kwok argues, should not focus on truth claims in isolation, but rather on multiple and complex "intrareligious and interreligious networks of cultural relations."[121] Similarly to Boyarin, she draws upon the work of David Chidester and contends that, when the focus is shifted from reified religion to complex, contested relations, the central issue is no longer "religious diversity, but religious difference

[116] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 200.
[117] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 201-202.
[118] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 202.
[119] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 203.
[120] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 203-204.
[121] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 205.

as it is constituted and produced in concrete situations, often with significant power differentials."[122]

More specifically, Kwok identifies three central areas of investigation related to the production of religious difference: the manner in which Western Christian theological discourse is constructed in order to justify hierarchical evaluation of religions, with Christianity as the apex; the relationship between religion and civil society (including the Western issue of secular and religious separation); and the transformation of religious symbols and institutions in contexts of migration, exile, and transnationalism.[123] Kwok further argues that the unique contribution that feminist theologians can make to a postcolonial theology of religious difference is analysis of the intersections between patriarchal relations and other colonial and unequal relations.[124]

In the context of a larger study of the relations between and discourses of Muslim and Christian women in Northern Nigeria, Kathleen McGarvey evaluates the standard paradigms of theology of religions, highlights areas of commonality between feminist theology and theology of religions, and constructs a feminist-ethical response to religious pluralism.

McGarvey argues that pluralistic approaches to theology of religions have highlighted either sameness or difference, with a resultant neglect of the necessity and importance of dialogue, which is central in her study of the Northern Nigeria context. By focusing on sameness or difference alone, "there is no room or need for dialogue. Either there is no Other to dialogue with, or else the Other is so much Other that dialogue is impossible."[125] In addition to this general criticism, she specifically argues against John Hick's 'universal phenomenalist'

[122] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 205.
[123] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 205-206.
[124] Kwok, "Beyond Pluralism," 207.
[125] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 283.

pluralism, due to its lack of attention to the fact that diverse religious paths actually come into conflict over both *what* they 'see' and *how* they 'see.'[126] Raimon Pannikar's 'particularist phenomenalist' pluralism, which focuses on a singular mystical approach giving rise to diverse doctrinal expressions, is similarly ill-equipped to address pressing issues related to social harmony.[127] With the particularist approach of S. Mark Heim, McGarvey highlights the fact that an emphasis on different paths and salvations leads to a lack of relationality and mutual responsibility.[128] Finally, in reference to the soteriocentric-ethical pluralism promoted by scholars such as Paul Knitter, she argues that, although the ethical focus is vital, the assumptions of a shared conception of justice, that praxis must precede doctrinal discussions, and that rules for dialogue can be outlined prior to dialoguing are problematic.[129]

Similarly to McCarthy, McGarvey states that feminist theology has much to contribute to the discourse of theology of religions. Since feminist theology grapples with "issues of sameness, difference and otherness" in concrete and diverse contexts, it could potentially provide the foundations for a new paradigm that overcomes the aforementioned weaknesses.[130] McGarvey highlights certain similarities between feminist theology and theology of religions in order to justify this perspective.[131] These include recognition that the 'other' has frequently been depicted in an essentialized—and negative—manner; that a universal norm for all of humanity is problematic; and that there is a need to distinguish critically between 'timeless truths' and historical perspectives/prejudices.

---

[126] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 284-285. See Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*.
[127] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 285-286. See Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1999).
[128] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 286-287. See S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).
[129] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 287-288. See Paul Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," in Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 178-200.
[130] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 290.
[131] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 291-296.

McGarvey then details the specific contributions that she feels feminist theology can make to theology of religions, thus moving the discourse beyond its current status. The first is a challenge to the assumption—an assumption made by most feminist theologians involved in theology of religions—that a feminist approach would necessarily be pluralistic. McGarvey contends that this is not the case, since pluralistic models generally attribute equal value to all religions. Feminist theologians do not assign equal value to every religion or religious practice—especially those that oppress or marginalize women—and therefore "it would be incoherent for feminist theologians to say that one religion, opinion or belief is automatically as good as another."[132] She argues that a feminist approach would not automatically give equal value to all religions, nor would it automatically require the denial of unique truth claims; rather, it would be an inclusivist approach that sought to "purify" truth claims of historical prejudices.

The second contribution is a focus on ethics, but with a reconceptualization of the criterion of justice as something which is created in the process of dialogue, not something that is universally affirmed. This reconceptualization, according to McGarvey, overcomes many of the shortcomings of other approaches to theology of religions as it recognizes particularities and gives them a voice in the process of dialogue; does not apply a theoretical universal norm; allows for context-specific variations; and retains a sense of "global responsibility and ethics."[133] The final two contributions that McGarvey discusses are an understanding of dialogue as being an activity that takes place between individuals rather than 'religions,' and a depiction of identity as continuously and dynamically shaped through

[132] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 299.
[133] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 299-301.

various interactions.[134] Many aspects of these two contributions are drawn from Hill Fletcher, and they stress complex relationality and change in response to context.

Based upon these four foundational insights, McGarvey articulates her feminist-ethical response to religious pluralism.[135] Like Kwok's postcolonial theology of religious difference, this response focuses on the complexity of human existence, rather than isolated truth claims. Although her response begins with praxis, McGarvey redefines praxis not as social action only, but also as a shared examination and discussion of lived realities and the role that religious doctrines play in those realities. Such praxis may lead towards doctrinal reformulation, but only on a context-specific—rather than universal—basis. As an inclusive model, the goal is not to deny truth claims, but to reexamine them and have them grow in meaning in the process of dialogue over shared concerns and in recognition of mutual solidarity and global responsibility. In her feminist-ethical response to religious pluralism, McGarvey clarifies, the goal is that "adherents of each religion will seek to include the other and be responsible for the other, but will not impose on the other."[136]

4. Insights and Extensions: Towards a Muslima *Theology of Religious Difference*

As is evident in the preceding survey, feminist theologians have proposed a wide variety of distinctive and intricate insights into religious pluralism and theology of religions. In this section, I will focus upon some of those insights that I feel are particularly appropriate for extending the general conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters of

[134] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 301-304.
[135] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 305-307. Since she explicitly describes her model as inclusivist and critiques the model of pluralism, McGarvey's use of the phrase "religious pluralism" here seems to refer to the fact of religious diversity, not the model in the standard typology of theology of religions.
[136] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 306.

the Qur'ān to the specific topic of religious difference, thereby forming the basis of a *Muslima* theology of religious difference.

Before endeavoring to do so, however, it is important to introduce a few critiques of the ideas offered by these feminist theologians. While my main objective in this chapter is to garner hermeneutical extensions for a *Muslima* theology, there are certain theories that have been promoted within this emergent field that must be further examined. One of the most glaring is the direct equation of sexual difference and religious difference. As I noted at the end of Chapter Four, the direct of equation of the two is an oversimplification due to the fact that religious difference involves an element of choice that is not present with sexual difference. It is clear that both sexism and religious exclusivism have promoted unfavorable depictions and oppression of their respective 'others.' However, these objectionable outcomes should not obscure the nuances of each form of difference.

Another critique can be raised in reference to the discussion of norms and the sources from which norms are derived. The majority of the feminist theologians discussed in this chapter veer away from the blatant extension of a particular religious norm to all other religions, and they aim to affirm the particularity of the religious 'other.' However, they simultaneously—with varying degrees of success—wish to avoid relativism. Therefore, many of them turn to ethical principles, such as justice (Suchocki) or the promotion of the full humanity of women (Ruether), as substitute criteria by which religions or religious practices can be assessed. While I will discuss this form of evaluation in greater detail later in this section, the assumption that such ethical criteria are not premised upon particular norms is in itself tenuous.

Finally, as seen with McCarthy, the notion that women are especially aware of particularity, multiplicity, and the impossibility of universalizing norms comes dangerously close to essentialism. Awareness of particularity, multiplicity and universal norms is not something that is inherently linked with the female sex; rather, such awareness is linked with the experience of 'otherness,' especially the experience of being the powerless 'other.' This is why similar insights—even the use of identity theory—appear in the work of male scholars, such as Esack, who are writing in light of their experiences with other forms of oppression and exclusion.

Returning to the topic of insights and extensions, the first insight is related to perspectives on the standard typology of theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism (and sometimes particularism). Many of the cited feminist theologians explicitly support the model of religious pluralism over and against inclusivism or exclusivism, the latter of which is characterized as "outrageous" and "absurd."[137] Religious pluralism is deemed to be the "only suitable candidate,"[138] which feminists must "radically affirm."[139] While Gross makes a fairly simple argument that women's experience of exclusion makes it "inconceivable"[140] for feminists to exclude other 'others,' Suchocki presents a more complex rationale for her selection of pluralism, equating exclusivism with the assignment of negative attributes to the religious 'other' and inclusivism with the extension of one specific norm to all religions. Suchocki's depiction of exclusivism and inclusivism align with Ruether's depiction of scapegoating and marginalization. Since convergences have already been highlighted between

[137] Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 7.
[138] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 65.
[139] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," 149. See also Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Feminisms: Syncretism, Symbiosis, and Synergetic Dance," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (London: SCM, 2008), 136-154.
[140] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 65.

Ruether's depiction and Muslim women interpreters' conception of difference, it is fairly clear that exclusivism and inclusivism—in their most standard definitions—would be problematic models for a *Muslima* theology of religious difference. The question of whether pluralism would be the ideal alternative, however, remains.

While Gross contends that the suitability of pluralism is not "a controversial point among feminist theologians,"[141] a number of the scholars surveyed disagree and highlight deficiencies in all three models of the standard typology. King, for example, describes the typology as a whole as narrow, static, and lacking nuance. Hill Fletcher depicts the models and theology of religions as having reached an "impasse of sameness and difference," a stalemate resulting from a focus on either 'sameness universalism' or 'hierarchical otherness,' on the universalization of Christian norms, and on a particular conception of religions and religious identity. While focused primarily on pluralistic models, similar criticisms are also voiced by McGarvey and Kwok. McGarvey notes the inability of pluralism to deal simultaneously with sameness and difference; this inability results in either a singular focus on sameness (as if there is no 'other') or a singular focus on difference (as if the 'other' is too other). Kwok's critique of pluralism underscores the problematic nature of the reified concept of 'religion,' describing it as a Western and Christian imposition.

The evaluations offered by King, Hill Fletcher, McGarvey and Kwok of pluralism specifically and of the entire typology share much in common with my assessment of the major shortcomings in the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious diversity. In Chapter Three, I identified two prominent shortcomings: the conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries; and the

[141] Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 65.

lack of a model that integrates diverse considerations including sameness, difference, and interaction. Hill Fletcher's discussion of the logic of identity and Kwok's critique of the category of reified religion echo the shortcomings identified with a bounded, static, discrete view of religious difference. McGarvey's explanation of the focus on sameness *or* difference raises the issue of accounting for the 'proximate other.' Although I did not evaluate any Islamic approaches based solely upon difference, the same struggle to account simultaneously for sameness, difference, and interconnections is apparent. Based upon these convergences, a *Muslima* theology follows these scholars in attempting to move beyond all of the standard models and to construct a new model.

It is also worth noting that some of the deficiencies that feminist theologians identify were also raised by Muhammad Legenhausen in his critique of reductive pluralism. While there are limitations in his non-reductive alternative, his evaluation of the focus on sameness alone and the implicit universalization of Christian norms underscore the inadequacy of a pluralistic model.[142]

For feminist theologians (and for Legenhausen), the central issue at stake in the construction of a new model is difference. This is not to imply that the feminist theologians discussed in this chapter focus only on difference; rather, it indicates that issues surrounding difference have been the foremost sticking points in theology of religions. Frequently, difference has been rejected, ignored, and downplayed. When acknowledged, it has raised questions about the relationship between various 'differents,' questions that have been answered primarily through hierarchal evaluation and/or relativism. Feminist theologians are thus faced with a difficult dilemma in that none of these options is acceptable. Their

[142] Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 58-63.

experiences of diversity and otherness; their sensitivity to the presentation of a particular norm as a universal norm; and their inability to affirm relativism all necessitate that they develop a novel way in which to conceive of difference differently.

Ruether, for example, states that religious differences or particularities must be considered and valued. Valuing, however, should not be based upon hierarchical evaluation or application of a universal norm; it should be based upon recognition of a new type of relationship, mutuality. Plaskow correspondingly argues that the Jewish concept of chosenness should be reconceived as 'distinctiveness' in order that "the relationship between these various communities—Jewish to non-Jewish, Jewish to Jewish—should be understood not in terms of hierarchical differentiation."[143] If acknowledging and valuing difference is required—which it is for feminist theologians—what is the alternative to hierarchical evaluation?

One alternative—as was seen in Chapter Three—is to adopt a view of different religions existing in isolation. This, of course, is a difficult strategy to apply in the concrete contemporary world. Akin to my assessment of Nasr's approach, McGarvey criticizes a number of pluralistic models based precisely upon their inability to account for the fact that different religions and religious communities interact—and come into conflict—in the real world. Furthermore, the preceding allusions to Ruether and Plaskow demonstrate that for feminist theologians the acknowledgement and valuing of difference is connected to relationality. Notably, the conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters involves a similar linking of difference and relationality; the telos of divinely-intended difference is to facilitate certain relationships, relationships described variously as mutual, complementary, or

[143] Plaskow, *Standing Again*, 105.

functional, but never hierarchical. In light of this, Wadud describes attempts to ignore or eliminate difference as "spiritually, morally and socially counterproductive." A model that values difference based upon isolation, therefore, is an unacceptable alternative for both feminist theologians and a *Muslima* theology. The question thus becomes how to account for and value difference with relationality but without hierarchical evaluation.

Before exploring the strategies feminist theologians adopt in order to achieve this, a crucial clarification must be made. Feminist theologians all seem to voice an unequivocally negative assessment of hierarchal evaluation. In reality, however, they do not reject all hierarchal assessment. Ruether, McCarthy, Suchocki, and McGarvey, for example, dismiss relativism as a model of religious pluralism. If relativism is dismissed, then they must adopt some standard for comparative evaluation. For Ruether, the standard is the promotion of the full humanity of women. For Suchocki, the standard is justice. These standards are not based (or not supposed to be based) on the exclusive norm of one religious tradition, but they are nonetheless standards of evaluation that rank religious practices and teachings according to various degrees of value, that is, in a hierarchical fashion. The real contention of these scholars, therefore, is not that all hierarchal evaluation is wrong. What is wrong is hierarchal evaluation that describes a thing as automatically good or automatically bad based *only* upon affiliation or non-affiliation with a particular religious community.[144]

A strong parallel exists between this more nuanced explication of feminist theologians' perspectives on hierarchical evaluation and the differentiation Barlas makes between lateral and hierarchical difference.[145] Lateral difference—with which she associates sexual, cultural, linguistic, and religious variation—can never be the subject of evaluation. Hierarchical

[144] McGarvey, *Muslim and Christian Women*, 299.
[145] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 11.

difference—which is associated with variations in *taqwā* alone—is the only subject of evaluation. In Part Three, I will explore further the implications of this distinction and of evaluations based upon *taqwā.*

Returning to the question of how feminist theologians account for and value difference with relationality but without hierarchical evaluation, it is notable that McCarthy, Hill Fletcher, Kwok, and McGarvey all adopt the same strategy: they utilize insights drawn from identity theory to reconceptualize difference. Whereas standard models of theology of religions all operate from a shared conception of religions as clearly distinct entities, identity theory challenges these assumptions, presenting individual and group identity as multi-faceted, embedded and dynamic. McCarthy, for instance, draws upon notions of multiple identity and multiple social locations. Hill Fletcher offers a complex reinterpretation of religious difference in her critique of the 'logic of identity' and 'container theory' and in her introduction of the concepts of hybrid identity and a web of relationality. Kwok struggles with the reified conception of religion because it is a Western, Christian imposition, but also because it in no way accounts for complex, ongoing, and contested relations. A similar emphasis on the construction of identity through interactions and relationality is put forth by McGarvey and defines her description of and emphasis on dialogue.

The Muslim women interpreters I examined in Chapter Four do not utilize identity theory in the same explicit manner. Barlas, however, does differentiate between sexual (biological) difference and the reified concept of gender, arguing that while the Qurʾānic text discusses sexual/biological difference it never mentions gender.[146] Wadud makes an analogous contention when she states that the Qurʾān does not dictate any particular, fixed social roles

[146] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 11, 130.

outside of the biological act of child-bearing.[147] The aversion to the reified concept of gender is connected to the desire to account for the complexity within the Qurʾānic text, to contextualize it and to ensure its enduring relevance. Therefore, while Muslim women interpreters are focused on the Qurʾānic text and interpretation, they are asserting the same concern for dynamic and complex relationality. This appears to indicate that an application of identity theory to religious difference would be an appropriate and valuable strategy for a *Muslima* theology.

The suitability of this application is also supported by the use of identity theory in the work of Esack. As discussed in Chapter Three, Esack's approach is capable of accounting for the 'proximate other'—capable of overcoming one of two main shortcomings I identified in contemporary Islamic discourse on religious difference—precisely because he employs insights drawn from identity theory to argue against the notion of a 'stable self.'[148] Recognizing that religious identity is complex and dynamic, he embarks upon an exploration of the Qurʾānic discourse in which he illuminates the complexity and dynamism of central categories that denote religious difference. It is important to note that Esack also raises a challenge to reification through the focus of his analysis. While the Qurʾān does mention certain historical religious communities—for example the Jews, Nazarenes, and Sabians—Esack does not primarily focus on these historical groups; rather, he focuses on the Qurʾānic categories of *īmān*, *islām*, *kufr*, *ahl al-kitāb*, and *mushrikūn*, and argues that they are complex, fluid, and not aligned in a fixed fashion with any particular historical community.

Similar to Esack, in a *Muslima* theology of religious difference, insights garnered from identity theory will be applied in the context of Qurʾānic reinterpretation. This focus on the

[147] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 64-65.
[148] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*," 53.

Qurʾān, though, diverges from the focus of some feminist theologians discussed in this chapter, who attempt to prioritize ethics over doctrine in discussions of religious diversity. Employing the liberative concept of justice, Suchocki advocates the sidelining of doctrinal and ideological concerns. Likewise, Gross argues that the focus should be placed on ethical, rather than metaphysical questions. It may not, however, be as easy to quarantine doctrinal and metaphysical questions as Suchocki and Gross suggest. McGarvey, for instance, perceptively argues that a universal concept of justice does not exist, and thus that an operative concept of justice must be developed in the process of dialogue. Furthermore, she contends that doctrinal formulations have a direct bearing on ethical perspectives and must be discussed in the context of dialogue and social action.

Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān concur with McGarvey about the interconnections between ethical and doctrinal formulations. In fact, their entire reinterpretative enterprise is premised upon the notion that the Qurʾān is an invaluable source of ethical guidance, guidance that can help to unravel some of the historical formulations and interpretations that have led to less than just circumstances. In many ways, there exists an ongoing dialectic between doctrine and ethics for Muslim women interpreters. Certain doctrinal formulations are viewed as unethical and, thus, contradictory to the Qurʾānic text. Therefore, they return to the Qurʾānic text to illuminate alternative doctrinal possibilities. In turn, those doctrinal reformulations are used to present a necessary and invaluable challenge to other formulations that legitimate oppression, exclusion, and injustice. This process continues in various contexts and in response to various circumstances. In fact, Muslim women interpreters define Qurʾānic universality in terms of the ongoing capacity of the Qurʾān to provide the foundations for contextually-responsive and ethical doctrinal possibilities.

While a *Muslima* theology will follow Esack and aim to illuminate the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference by stressing complexity, fluidity, and multiplicity, it will also retain the emphasis on relationality that is so essential to feminist theologians. This means that instead of focusing primarily on the dynamism within Qurʾānic categories, a *Muslima* theology will pay particular attention to the interconnections, points of contact, and border zones among Qurʾānic categories of religious difference. In contrast to the historical tendency to seek clarity through the forced reduction of Qurʾānic complexity and the enforcement of static boundaries between these categories, in a *Muslima* theology of religious difference, the dynamic intersections in the Qurʾānic web of relationality will be explored in an effort to illuminate guidance that arises out of the complexity.

5. Conclusion

Bringing together the conception of difference drawn from Muslim women interpreters and the extensions drawn from feminist theologians, the conceptual outline of a *Muslima* theology of religious difference emerges. A *Muslima* theology critiques standard models of theology of religions (including exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism) that are based on difference or sameness alone, and aims to articulate an integrated, multifaceted alternative to them. A *Muslima* theology explores both human sameness and religious difference, as well as the relationship between the two. In reference to religious difference, a *Muslima* theology challenges the fixation with viewing difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. In contrast with this depiction of difference, a *Muslima* theology utilizes the insights of identity theory and

thereby places primary emphasis on illuminating the Qurʾānic web of complex, dynamic relationality.

The question that now arises is whether or not the hermeneutical model of Muslim women interpreters that was outlined in Chapter Four is capable of providing the methodological infrastructure for carrying out this project. Certainly many elements of a *Muslima* theology of religious difference are drawn from the conceptual framework of Muslim women interpreters; however, there are also significant extensions to it resulting from insights connected to identity theory and the primary emphasis on relationality. Is the hermeneutical method of Muslim women interpreters suited to explicating dynamic and complex relationality within Qurʾān? Or, as was the case with the conception of difference, are there also hermeneutical extensions that need to be made when moving from a discussion of sexual difference to a discussion of religious difference? If hermeneutical extensions are necessary, from where should they come? It is to these questions that I shall turn in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

From Holistic Interpretation to Relational Interpretation: Hermeneutical Insights from Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantic Analysis of the Qurʾān

1. Introduction

In addition to their unique conception of difference, Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān also propose a complex hermeneutical approach. To reiterate what was already noted in Chapter Four, their hermeneutical approach is characterized by a prioritization of and central focus on the Qurʾān, which is described as a unified, intentional and purposeful whole. As the verbatim and inerrant Word of God, the Qurʾān is the principal standard for theological reinterpretation. Utilizing a genre of the classical method of *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān*, Wadud, Barlas, and Hassan emphasize textual holism, textual unity, thematic sensitivity, and an overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*. They also distinguish between the Qurʾānic text and interpretations thereof; they depict the Qurʾān as polysemic, and evaluate various interpretations and hermeneutical approaches in light of theological, contextual and practical implications.

Is this hermeneutical approach appropriate for the task of exploring and illuminating the Qurʾānic web of complex, dynamic relationality related to the topic of religious difference? Certainly their primary focus upon and representation of the Qurʾān is appropriate. So too is the emphasis placed upon polysemy, as it allows the dynamism inherent in the text to be retained. If there is no pretense to having uncovered the one and only meaning of the text,

then complexity and dynamism are not seen as something that must be contained or simplified. Furthermore, their attention to theological, contextual, and practical implications remains vital in reference to the new topic of religious difference.

With regard to exploring the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference, the main shortcoming in their hermeneutical approach, however, relates to the manner in which they carry out *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān*. While they do emphasize textual holism and unity, they have primarily depended upon cross-referencing, retranslation, and thematic and historical contextualization of individual terms and concepts. For instance, Wadud's reinterpretation of the term *zawj* (mate, spouse, pair)[1] as two equally essential and intentional parts of a larger whole is formulated by citing other verses that use the term in relation to plants and animals and other verses that indicate that pairing is a universal aspect of all of creation.[2] She also discusses the term *zawj* in relation to the Hereafter, focusing on *āyāt* such as Qurʾān 37:21-22: "'This is the Day of Decision, which you used to deny. Gather together those who did wrong, and others like them (*ʾazwājahum*), as well as whatever they worshipped.'"[3] Yet in doing so, she invokes thematic and historical contextualization to argue that the Qurʾānic theme of individual responsibility rules out any interpretation that depicts the *zawj*'s fate as contingent upon another person.[4] She, likewise, critiques the conflation of *zawj* with *ḥūr* (companions in Paradise), stating that it reduces the "Qurʾanic depiction of the highest reality to a single

[1] The primary verse she is discussing is Qurʾān 4:1: "People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship. God is always watching over you."
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالاً كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاء وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءلُونَ بِهِ وَالأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

[2] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 20-22.

[3] Qurʾān 37:21-22:
هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ
احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ

[4] It is important to note that *ʾazwājahum* is more commonly translated as "wives" or "spouses," hence the nature of Wadud's critique.

ethnocentric world-view."[5] Without dismissing the value and novelty of Wadud's method and interpretative conclusions, these strategies alone will not be sufficient to illuminate the dynamic relationships and overlap between multiple terms and concepts. As a result, it is necessary to supplement the hermeneutical approach drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān with insights that are consistent with their approach and capable of elucidating relationships and complexities in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

A highly suitable resource to supplement their hermeneutic is the method of semantic analysis proposed by Toshihiko Izutsu.[6] Similarly to Muslim women interpreters, Izutsu's semantic analysis focuses principally on the Qurʾānic text, conceiving of it as a unified whole with a distinctive worldview.[7] Izutsu's method, however, ascribes great significance to the intra-textual relational context in determining the meaning of key Qurʾānic concepts. This attentiveness to relational context is capable of providing insights necessary for exploring—without reductionism—the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

In this chapter, therefore, I will survey the hermeneutical approach of Toshihiko Izutsu, focusing primarily on his intra-Qurʾānic and synchronic semantic methodology. I will also briefly examine his description of the overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* and his semantic analysis of various Qurʾānic categories of religious difference, indicating strengths as well as shortcomings. I will conclude this chapter by articulating the hermeneutic of relationality that forms the interpretative approach of a *Muslima* theology of religious

[5] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 55-57.
[6] Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993) taught at Keio University in Tokyo (also his *alma mater*), McGill University in Montréal, and the Royal Institute of the Study of Philosophy in Tehran. In addition to the works discussed in this chapter, he also published widely on Islamic Sufism, Hindu Advaita Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism (particularly Zen), and Philosophical Taoism. Among his English works are *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983); *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1994); *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).
[7] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 74-99. In terms of his semantic method, Izutsu draws primarily upon the work of Leo Weisgerber. (See Leo Weisgerber, *Grundformen sprachicher Weltgestaltung* [Köln u. Opladen, 1963].)

pluralism. This will involve the discussion of insights drawn from Izutsu's approach, as well a discussion of significant divergences from his conclusions.

2. Relational Meaning and the Semantic Weltanschauung*: Toshihiko Izutsu's Method of Analysis*

Toshihiko Izutsu defines semantics as the analysis of a language's key terms in order eventually to arrive at

> a conceptual grasp of the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them.[8]

Based upon this definition, he clarifies that his application of semantic analysis to the Qurʾān is in fact an endeavor to explicate the distinctive Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*, an endeavor to investigate "how, in the view of the Scripture, the world of Being is structured, what are the major constituents of the world, and how they are related to each other."[9] As the preceding quote indicates, Izutsu's primary focus is not on individual Qurʾānic concepts. While analysis of individual concepts has value, a central premise of his semantic approach is that the various concepts which comprise the Qurʾānic—or for that matter, any—worldview do not stand in isolation from one another; rather, they are "closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings precisely from the entire system of relations."[10] Individual concepts are woven together into a complex conceptual system (worldview), and therefore what is most vital is to garner an understanding of the relationships and interconnections between concepts.

Consistent with this emphasis, Izutsu distinguishes between what he calls the "basic" and "relational" meaning of words.[11] He defines basic meaning as the meaning or conceptual

[8] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 3.
[9] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 3.
[10] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 4.
[11] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 11-12.

content an individual word has and retains outside of the Qurʾānic context. Izutsu argues that, while the basic meaning perpetually inheres in the word, it does not exhaust the meaning of the term.[12] In the context of the Qurʾān, every word also has a relational meaning, a connotative meaning defined by its "complex" and "particular" relations to other Qurʾānic words and concepts.[13] The relational meaning is determined by "the word's having taken a particular position in a particular field, standing in diverse relations to all other important words in that system."[14] Since he is interested in elucidating the overarching worldview, Izutsu emphasizes the primacy of relational meaning over basic meaning.

The structure of the whole conceptual system, or the semantic *Weltanschauung*, is closely-knit and determined by a number of important words/concepts, which Izutsu refers to as key-terms.[15] Acknowledging a degree of arbitrariness in the identification of key-terms within the Qurʾān, Izutsu nevertheless contends that key-terms constitute the general pattern of the conceptual vocabulary through their "diverse and multiple relations with each other."[16] Underscoring the fact that concepts do not exist in isolation and that the conceptual vocabulary is never a haphazard collection, Izutsu states that the diverse and multiple relations between individual concepts result in a "number of largely overlapping areas or sectors," that is, semantic fields.[17] Each semantic field is comprised of multiple key-terms that cluster around one focus-word, meaning a particularly important key-term.

[12] Although Izutsu states that basic meaning does not change, he also acknowledges that basic meaning in itself is a methodological postulate that cannot in fact be located in the real world. In the real world, all words are "complex social and cultural phenomena." (Izutsu, *God and Man*, 16.) Cf. Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001), 82-83.
[13] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 12.
[14] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 13.
[15] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 15. He also refers to these as key-words. I will retain 'key-terms' throughout.
[16] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 19.
[17] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 20.

Izutsu's depiction of the semantic relations in the Qurʾān is further complexified by the fact that key-terms and even focus-words are not restricted to only one semantic field; they normally have a "multiple relationship to many other words that properly belong to other fields."[18] A key-term in one field may be a key-term in another; it may be the "connecting link" between two systems.[19] In fact, this is virtually universal since the semantic fields of the Qurʾān are largely overlapping. Moreover, a key-term may be the focus-word of another semantic field, and inversely, a focus-word may be a key-term in a different field. The overlapping focus-words, key-terms, and semantic fields, thus, form a "myriad of associative interconnections" that define the "patterning principle" or distinctive character of the organized and unified semantic *Weltanschauung*.[20] In light of this depiction, Izutsu describes the process of semantic analysis as being initially focused on

> trying to isolate major conceptual spheres of the Qurʾan, then ... engaged in discovering how these various spheres or semantic fields, large and small, are delimited by their neighbors, how they are related with one another, how they are internally structured, and how they are organized and integrated into the largest multi-strata system, i.e., that of the whole Qurʾan.[21]

Referring more specifically to the process by which this form of contextual interpretation is carried out, Izutsu acknowledges that not every Qurʾānic passage in which a key-term or focus-word appears will have "semantic significance."[22] Semantic significance emerges only when a passage illuminates a particular nuance or aspect of a term or concept. To clarify, Izutsu details seven situations in which this commonly occurs within the Qurʾān.[23] The first is when a passage provides a concrete and precise definition of a term, such as Qurʾān

[18] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 23-24.
[19] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 27.
[20] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 27-28.
[21] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 21-22.
[22] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 37-38.
[23] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 39-44.

2:177, which defines *al-birr*.[24] The second relates to synonyms and the manner in which they are substituted for each other. The third is when the semantic structure of a term is revealed through contrast with another term. Fourth is when the meaning of an obscure term (X) is clarified through its negative form (not-X). The fifth is through analysis of the "patterned semantic relations between certain words," or the semantic fields.[25] Sixth is the occurrence of the rhetorical device of parallelism through which multiple terms are associated with the same topic. For example, Izutsu cites Qurʾān 5:44, 45, and 47 as offering parallel critiques of the *kāfirūn* (disbelievers), *ẓālimūn* (wrong-doers), and *fāsiqūn* (grave sinners).[26] The final common situation is when terms that have "deep religious import" are used in non-religious contexts, thus revealing or emphasizing different nuances in their meaning.[27]

Semantic analysis of the Qurʾān can be carried out in synchronic and diachronic fashions. In the synchronic approach, the Qurʾān is treated as a complete vocabulary, and the goal is to illuminate the distinctive aspects of that vocabulary.[28] Diachronic semantic analysis aims to compare vocabularies at different historical intervals. Izutsu, for example, compares

[24] "Goodness (Piety) does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God."

لَّيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَـكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَالْمَلآئِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُواْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاء والضَّرَّاء وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَـئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

[25] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 42.

[26] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 43. Excerpts from Qurʾān 5:44, 45, and 47: "... Those who do not judge according to what God has sent down are *kāfirūn*"; "... Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are *ẓālimūn*"; and "... Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are *fāsiqūn*."

...وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

...وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

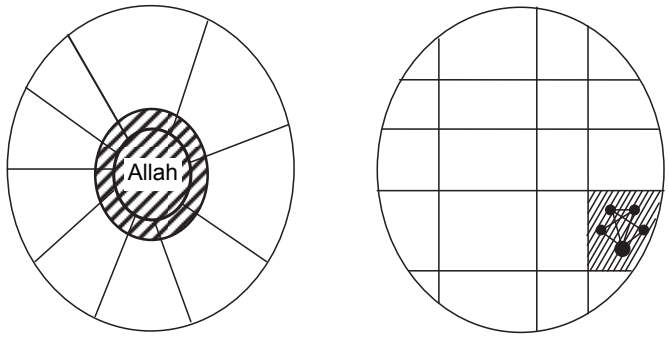
...وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

[27] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 44.

[28] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 33. Izutsu uses the terms vocabulary and *Weltanschauung* interchangeably. They are the conceptual and linguistic sides of the same entity. His only distinction is that the vocabulary is the concretization of the conceptual system. (Izutsu, *God and Man*, 27.)

the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* to both the pre-Qurʾānic, or *Jahili*, worldview[29] and various post-Qurʾānic worldviews.[30] In diachronic analysis, Izutsu emphasizes that, regardless of the fact that different vocabularies may share many of the same words, the words are structured according to different patterning principles; they are understood and situated in different conceptual relationships.[31] Izutsu, for example, discusses how the Qurʾān utilizes some of the same concepts that were prevalent in pre-Qurʾānic discourse. The Qurʾān, however, transposed them into a different network, configuring them into different relations with other concepts, and thus modifying old meanings and producing new meanings.[32] One example of this phenomenon, according to Izutsu, is the concept of Allāh (see Diagram 1).[33] In the Qurʾānic system, the concept of Allāh presides "over the entire vocabulary comprising all semantic fields;" it is the supreme focus-word.[34] By contrast, in the pre-Islamic system the concept of Allāh was situated in only one semantic field, side by side with other concepts such as *āliha* (gods/divinities) and without

Diagram 1



[29] See "From Tribal Code to Islamic Ethics" in Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 49-134.
[30] See Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006). This is a reprint of the original publication (Tokyo: Keio University, 1965). In this work, Izutsu offers an in depth exploration of various positions—including those of the Khārijites, Murjiʾites, al-Ghazālī, Ashʿarī, and Ibn Taymiyya—on the definitions of and relationship between *īmān* and *islām*. Many of the issues he discusses in this work were introduced in Chapter Two of this study in the section entitled "Delineations of Qurʾānic Difference: Exegetical and Juridical Trends."
[31] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 36.
[32] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 5.
[33] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 36-38. This diagram, and the other diagrams in this chapter, are recreations of Izutsu's own diagrams. (Izutsu, *God and Man*, 37.)
[34] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 37.

significant contrast to them.[35] As is evident in this example, a change to any one concept in an integrated *Weltanschauung* reverberates throughout the entire system.[36] The transposition of the concept of Allāh not only reflects a change in the meaning of that one concept, but it also reflects a worldview that has been totally restructured in a theocentric fashion.

3. The Qurʾānic Weltanschauung*: Conceptual Opposition and a Basic Moral Dichotomy*

Despite the focus on complexity and nuance in his semantic method, Izutsu nonetheless describes the overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* as a "large multi-strata system" built upon the "principle of conceptual opposition."[37] Conceptual opposition—and the resultant aura of strain and tension—pervades the Qurʾānic system, manifesting in a series of specific oppositions. The first is that of God and humankind.[38] Although he recognizes that nothing can truly stand in opposition to God who, as Creator, is the center of all being, Izutsu describes the Qurʾān, God's Word, as primarily "concerned with the problem of the salvation of human beings."[39] It is because of this 'problem' that God has revealed the Qurʾān, and thus, humans form the second major "pole" in the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*.[40] The "basic confrontation" that exists between these two major poles—God and humankind—is the most significant conceptual opposition in the system. Despite his somewhat tenuous characterization of the relationship between God and humankind as confrontational, Izutsu simultaneously—and more astutely—describes the relationship as multiple, bilateral, and reciprocal. Moreover, he breaks it down into four primary aspects—the ontological

[35] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 38.
[36] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 7.
[37] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 75.
[38] Izutsu uses the term 'man," for which I have substituted humankind.
[39] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 76.
[40] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 76.

relationship of Creator to creature, the verbal and non-verbal communicative relationship, the Lord-servant relationship, and the ethical relationship—each of which he analyzes in detail.[41]

The second conceptual opposition is that of the Muslim community and non-Muslim 'others.' Izutsu defines the Muslim community as groups that acknowledge the preceding relationships between God and humankind, and choose the positive manifestations of those relationships.[42] In other words, Muslims are those who recognize God as the Creator, respond willingly and comprehensively to the divine call, behave toward God as true servants, and manifest gratitude and fear towards God. He, furthermore, contends that this community (*umma*) introduced and was based upon a "new idea of social unity ... common religious belief."[43] In a society that up until that time had been organized on the basis of blood-kinship, the notion of an *umma* presented a unique challenge that resulted in societal disturbance and change.

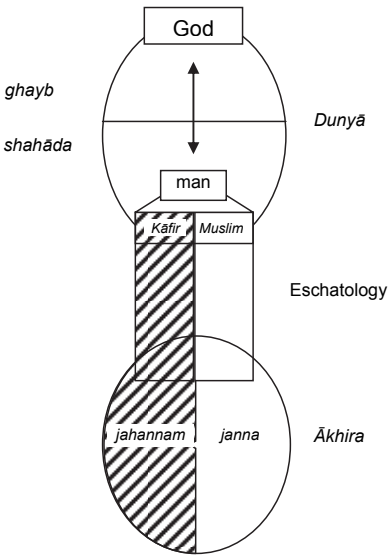
In his explication of the conceptual opposition of the Muslim community and non-Muslim 'others,' Izutsu introduces the Qurʾānic categories of *kuffār* (disbelievers), *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), and *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Scripture). He describes the *kuffār* as those individuals who openly refuse to affirm the various relationships between God and humankind. M*unāfiqūn* are a subgroup of the *kuffār*, who outwardly pretend to belong to the Muslim *umma*. In regard to *ahl al-kitāb*, Izutsu acknowledges a more complex and closer relationship. Nevertheless, he ultimately disregards this complexity and depicts the Muslim *umma* and *ahl al-kitāb* as also standing in conceptual opposition, a conceptual opposition that is "no less sharp than that of the Islamic *ummah* and the idolatrous *Kāfirs*."[44]

[41] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 77-78. His analysis of these four relationships forms the bulk of this work.
[42] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 79.
[43] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 79.
[44] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 82.

The remaining Qurʾānic conceptual oppositions that Izutsu emphasizes are the unseen (*ghayb*) and visible (*shahāda*) world; the present world (*al-dunyā*) and the Hereafter (*al-ākhira*); and the Garden (*al-janna*) and the Fire (*al-jahannam*) in the Hereafter.[45] He also notes that there are a series of eschatological concepts—such as the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, and Resurrection—that act as a transition between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira*.[46]

After outlining these foundational oppositions, Izutsu offers a comprehensive schematization of the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* (see Diagram 2).[47] This diagram clearly reiterates his emphasis on conceptual opposition in its oversimplification and establishment of clear-cut borders and endpoints. For example, while Izutsu acknowledges multiple groups of non-Muslim 'others'—*kuffār*, *munāfiqūn*, and *ahl al-kitāb*—and the particularities of each group, in this final diagram all non-Muslim communities have been subsumed under the heading of *kāfir* (disbeliever). This permits Izutsu to underscore the basic conceptual opposition between the Muslim *umma* and all others. These two clearly-delineated categories are then directly and unambiguously connected with two distinct endpoints: *al-janna* and *al-jahannam*. This not only maintains the forced neatness of his thesis of conceptual opposition, but it also reiterates his contention that salvation is the primary concern of the Qurʾān.

Diagram 2



The Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*

Izutsu revisits the notion of conceptual opposition in his more extensive semantic analysis of the categories of *īmān* (belief), *islām* (submission), and *kufr* (disbelief). He describes

[45] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 83-90.
[46] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 91.
[47] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 96.

islām and *kufr* as opposites that exist in the semantic field of *īmān*; "in this ... field, *kāfir* (or, to use the correspondingly nominal form, *kufr*) stands opposed to *īmān* contradictorily, while *Islām* (the nominal form correspondingly to *muslim*) and *īmān* are complementary concepts."[48] While he acknowledges that there is one place in the Qurʾān where the concepts of *īmān* and *islām* stand in "sharp contrast," he argues that this is an exceptional depiction applicable only to the Bedouin Arabs, not "ordinary Muslims" for whom *islām* is the ultimate religious act of complete surrender.[49] Therefore, he states that the terms *muʾmin* and *muslim* may be used interchangeably as they denote the same type of individual. He also contends that the most important issue in the Qurʾān is not the relationship between *īmān* and *islām*, but the "fundamental conceptual opposition" that exists between the synonyms *īmān* and *islām* and *kufr*.[50]

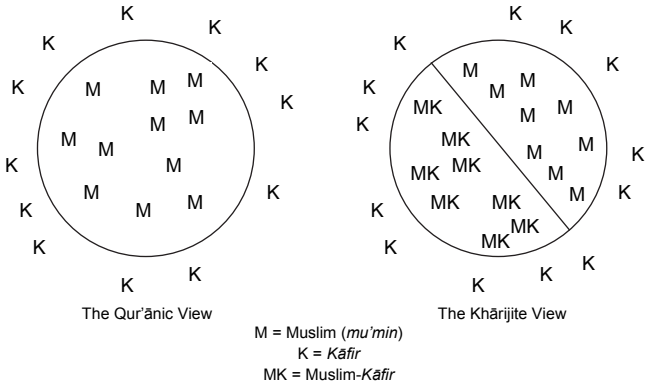
As indicated in his depiction of the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*, Izutsu conceives of *īmān* and *kufr* as being "radically opposed" and forming a basic and essential moral dichotomy.[51] *Īmān* is the center of all positive moral properties, and *kufr* is, conversely, the pivot around which all negative moral properties revolve.[52] Thus, despite some revealing insights into their semantic nuances, Izutsu describes the Qurʾānic concepts of *islām* and *ḥanīf* (which Izutsu

[48] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 49.
[49] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 49. He is referring to Qurʾān 49:14-15: "The desert Arabs say, 'We have faith.' Tell them, 'You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, "We have submitted," for faith has not yet entered your hearts.' If you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish any of your deeds: He is most forgiving and most merciful. The true believers are the ones who have faith in God and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind, the ones who have struggled with their possessions and their persons in God's way: they are the ones who are true."
قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِن قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِن تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُم مِّنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ
إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ
[50] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 51.
[51] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 118-119.
[52] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 213, 135.

defines as a 'non-denominational monotheist')[53] as aspects of *īmān*, and the Qurʾānic concepts of *shirk* (associationism) and *nifāq* (hypocrisy) as aspects of *kufr*.

The dichotomization of *īmān* and *kufr* is made even clearer in his diachronic analysis of the Qurʾānic worldview in relation to the post-Qurʾānic worldview of the Khārijites (see Diagram 3).[54] Therein, he describes the Qurʾānic position as "a very simple structure based on a clearcut distinction between Muslims and *Kāfirs*."[55] In this simple Qurʾānic view, there is no confusion or ambiguity—that is, the borders are clear—between the groups, and the two represent contrasting and static categories.[56]

Diagram 3



In the Khārijite worldview, the relational contextualization of *kufr* changes. *Kufr* is no longer something that exists only outside of the Muslim *umma*; it becomes something that is equally prevalent "within the wall."[57] As a result, the concept of *kufr* loses "its denotative stability and fixedness, and become something mobile, ready to be applied even to a pious Muslim if he happens to do this or that."[58] Izutsu contends that this leads to an emphasis on and complexification of the concept of *kufr*; the *kāfir* is not simply an "unbeliever" but now

[53] The definition of the term '*ḥanīf*' is a subject of debate, and Izutsu's definition is only one of multiple possible definitions. For more information on these discussions, see Uri Rubin, "Ḥanīf," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, 402; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), 75-87.
[54] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 9. Cf. Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52. These two diagrams differ slightly, but Izutsu's main contentions remain the same. I have, therefore, opted to use the most recent version of the diagram.
[55] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 9.
[56] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52.
[57] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 10.
[58] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52.

also a "wrong believer" (indicated in Diagram 3 by Muslim-*Kāfir*, or 'MK').[59] Furthermore, according to Izutsu, the main concern becomes the *kāfirūn* that exist "inside of the wall," whereas non-Muslim *kāfirūn* are neglected or even almost forgotten.[60]

4. Insights: Towards a Muslima *Hermeneutic of Relationality*

Based upon this exploration of Izutsu's method of semantic analysis and his depiction of the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*, in this section, I will discuss the manner in which his work is capable of supplementing the hermeneutical approach of Muslim women interpreters and thus providing the foundation for a *Muslima* hermeneutic of relationality. In doing so, I will also give significant attention to a number of crucial divergences between Izutsu's approach and that of a *Muslima* theology.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Izutsu's focus on the Qurʾān and depiction of the Qurʾān as a unified whole echo the central defining feature of the hermeneutical approach of Muslim women interpreters: the prioritization of the Qurʾān. In addition, Izutsu describes his approach as "a method which will let the Qurʾanic terms explain themselves."[61] The concern for 'listening' to the Qurʾān's self-explication is also evident in Muslim women interpreters, both in their emphasis of *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān* and in their critiques of heavy historical reliance upon—even prioritization of—other sources over the Qurʾānic text.

Another convergence between Izutsu's method and the hermeneutical approach of Muslim women interpreters is related to the topic of polysemy. As discussed in Chapter Four, Muslim women interpreters argue that the Qurʾān is polysemic, that is, open to multiple interpretations. Polysemy is a middle position between monovalency (the idea that the Qurʾān

[59] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 11-12.
[60] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 12.
[61] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 295.

has only one correct interpretation) and relativism (the idea that the Qurʾān is open to any interpretation). While Izutsu does offer one specific depiction of the Qurʾānic worldview, he nonetheless expresses an awareness of other interpretative possibilities. When introducing the particularity of his semantic method, for example, he acknowledges that the "Qurʾan is capable of being approached from a number of different points of view."[62]

Izutsu also recognizes a degree of arbitrariness in the selection of key-terms and focus-words; there is a possibility that other interpreters would identify different concepts as key-terms and focus-words.[63] Variances in the selection of terms and words could lead to different configurations of semantic fields. For example, Izutsu designates *nifāq* (hypocrisy) as a key-term in the semantic field of *kufr*. However, it would be possible to take *nifāq* itself as a focus-word in its own separate semantic field. This designation as a focus-word, however, would not result in it is being disconnected from the concept of *kufr*. A particular concept may be prioritized differently by different interpreters, but it is never removed from its relational context. Since it is not removed from its context, the degree of fluctuation in meaning is confined to a limited—though not monovalent—field of possibilities. Although Izutsu depicts the Qurʾānic worldview as static and fixed when comparing it to the Khārijite worldview, in the introduction of his interpretative process, he aptly describes the Qurʾānic worldview as a "living dynamic ontology."[64] Such a depiction parallels Muslim women interpreters' emphasis on the polysemic nature of the Qurʾānic text.

Beyond these convergences, the two most significant insights that Izutsu offers are his elevation of relational meaning over basic meaning, and his description of the process by which relational meaning is illuminated. In his definition of relational meaning as contextual,

[62] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 1.
[63] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 18.
[64] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 4.

complex, and multiple, he provides an invaluable alternative to approaches that attempt to interpret the Qurʾān by focusing on individual concepts in isolation and approaches that aim to establish clear-cut delineations between various concepts. According to Izutsu, isolation and clear-cut delineations are unable to fully grasp the intricacies of relational meaning and, therefore, unable to situate the meaning of any one concept within the larger integrated whole of the Qurʾānic worldview. At best, such methods are limited and at worst misrepresentative.

In his description of both the method of semantic analysis and the situations of semantic significance, he provides a lucid guide for identifying, explicating and integrating the various nuances of and relationships among Qurʾānic concepts. Furthermore, since the goal of this type of analysis is to describe semantic fields and the overlap between semantic fields, there is no need to attempt to reduce the complexity of Qurʾānic categories or to attempt to define them based upon one criterion. As discussed in Chapter Two, this obsession with identifying threshold criteria has dominated much historical Islamic discourse on religious diversity. Izutsu presents a process through which one is also able to avoid the common exegetical devices of *naskh* (abrogation) and chronological ordering, by which later verses are taken to be authoritative over earlier verses. Since concepts have multiple facets, and since they intersect and overlap, he is not compelled to resort to these tactics.[65]

Izutsu, thus, provides an alternative hermeneutical strategy that allows commonalities (overlaps) and distinctions to be illuminated. In other words, he provides a method that allows for complex and simultaneous consideration of aspects of sameness and aspects of difference

[65] It is interesting to note that many of the initial reviewers of his books critiqued him for this very lack of attention to chronology within the Qurʾānic text. For example, see Joseph Schacht, "Review of *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Koran* by Toshihiko Izutsu," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83, no. 3 (Aug.-Sept. 1963): 366-367, here 367; Harry B. Partin, "Semantics of the Qurʾān: A Consideration of Izutsu's Studies," *History of Religions* 9, no. 4 (May 1970): 358-362, here 360. Marilyn Waldman goes beyond a critique of Izutsu and attempts to carry out a systematic chronological study of the meaning of *kufr* in the Qurʾān. See Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "The Development of the Concept of *Kufr* in the Qurʾān," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep. 1968): 442-455.

between Qurʾānic concepts. This is precisely what other historical and contemporary hermeneutical approaches to religious difference have failed to do, and it is precisely what a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism intends to do.

It is worth noting that Izutsu's method not only extends the hermeneutical approach drawn from Muslim women interpreters, but it is also aligned with a *Muslima* theology's conception of difference as outlined in Chapter Five. Izutsu's approach steers away from both isolation and hierarchy. Isolation, as already mentioned, is an ineffective orientation when relational meaning is prioritized. Izutsu avoids hierarchy as well through relational emphasis, but also through his depiction of the structure of the Qurʾānic worldview. For instance, although he does identify Allāh as the 'supreme' focus-word in the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*, he constructs a system in which Allāh is situated centrally, rather than hierarchically (see Diagram 1). Furthermore, Izutsu's description of the Qurʾānic vocabulary as "an extremely tangled web of semantic groups" resonates with Hill Fletcher's emphasis on the web of dynamic relationality.[66] Although he describes his task as disentangling that web—something which would seem to be impossible and counter to his other assertions—his invocation of the analogy of the 'web' reemphasizes the suitability of his method to illuminating the foundational conception of difference of a *Muslima* theology.

Although Izutsu aims to utilize semantic analysis to arrive at a description of the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* as a whole, his interpretative methodology is also compatible with the analysis of other topics. However, while many scholars—including Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān—have cited Izutsu's conclusions, very few have attempted to co-opt his methodology and apply it to other subjects. One scholar who has attempted to do so is Daniel

[66] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 42. See also Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 87-88, 95-97.

Madigan. In *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, he explores the Qurʾānic concept of *kitāb* and argues, on the basis of his semantic analysis, that the concept represents a "process and symbol rather than bounded text and fixed canon."[67] Another work that applies Izutsu's method—albeit less explicitly than Madigan—is Shinya Makino's *Creation and Termination*.[68] Makino utilizes semantic analysis to arrive at the conclusion that termination, or the End of Time, is "the analogue of the creation."[69] A third and smaller application of Izutsu's methodology is found in Mohamed Aslam Haneef's and Hafas Furqani's exploration of the system and principles of Islamic economics.[70]

In Part Three of this study, I will follow these scholars and apply Izutsu's method to another—although not completely different—topic: the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. This topic has significant overlap with Izutsu's own analysis, since he examines key concepts such as *īmān*, *islām*, and *kufr* as part of his articulation of the overriding Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*. Therefore, in the remainder of this section, I will offer a critical evaluation of some of the shortcomings of his analytical conclusions. Many of these analytical conclusions are not only problematic because they diverge from central assumptions of a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism; they are also problematic in that they diverge from—even contradict—the basic tenets of his own method of semantic analysis.

The first major divergence relates to Izutsu's portrayal of the overarching Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung* as being characterized by conceptual opposition. As Barlas and various feminist theologians indicate, the idea of conceptual opposition is problematic in that it

[67] Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image*, 194.
[68] Shinya Makino, *Creation and Termination: A Semantic Study of the Structure of the Qurʾānic World View* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1970).
[69] Makino, *Creation and Termination*, 127.
[70] Mohamed Aslam Haneef and Hafas Furqani, "Developing the Ethical Foundations of Islamic Economics: Benefiting from Toshihiko Izutsu," *Intellectual Discourse* 17, no. 2 (2009): 173-199.

emphasizes radical difference only.[71] Such an emphasis is clear in Izutsu's description of *kufr* (or the *kāfir*) as the "exact antithesis" of *īmān* (or the *muʾmin*).[72] The focus on conceptual opposition is not only incongruent with the foundational conception of difference of a *Muslima* theology, but it also appears to be incongruent with Izutsu's own method.

Izutsu describes semantic analysis as analysis of the relational context of terms and concepts, analysis of overlaps and interconnections, as well as differences. This is why he prioritizes relational meaning and the notion of interlocking semantic fields. Yet, in his schematization of the Qurʾānic worldview (see Diagram 2), he presents the oppositional pairs as wholly distinct. As already mentioned, Izutsu, however, acknowledges some weaknesses in this schematization when he notes, for example, that nothing can really stand in opposition to God. Another indication of the limitations of his conception is found in the opposition of the concepts of *ghayb* (unseen) and *shahāda* (visible). It is difficult to understand how these two concepts can be conceived of as oppositional. Different, yes, but not standing in opposition.

One way to explain Izutsu's focus on conceptual opposition is to recognize it as a byproduct of his perspective that the Qurʾān is primarily concerned with salvation, eschatology and status in the Hereafter.[73] In one of his more valid conceptual oppositions, he divides the Hereafter into *al-janna* (the Garden) and *al-jahannam* (the Fire). While Izutsu is certainly neglecting some nuances in these two opposed categories,[74] he appears to utilize them as a means of arguing back to his presentation of humankind in the world. Izutsu states that salvation is the main issue in the Qurʾān. In terms of salvation, for him, there are two distinct endpoints. Based on these two distinct endpoints, he divides humanity into two

[71] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 131.
[72] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 216.
[73] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 122; Izutsu, *God and Man*, 76.
[74] There are significant debates over who will end up in the Garden/Fire, how long they will stay there, and the role of God's mercy in determining endpoints. See Khalil, *Muslim Scholarly Discussions.*

distinct groups: Muslims (that is, those that will go to the Garden) and *kuffār* (that is, those that will go to the Fire). Thus all nuances or differences among groups of people are collapsed and reduced; the only characteristic which is considered is the description of their respective endpoints. As an illustration of this, in Izutsu's analysis of *nifāq* (hypocrisy) in relation to *kufr*, he cites Qurʾān 66:9: "Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Deal with them sternly. Hell will be their home, an evil destination!"[75] Then, he states

> [t]his last point, that is, the decree of God that the final abode of the *munāfiq* should be the Hell Fire, is very significant in that it discloses the *essential* connection of *nifāq* and *kufr*, for the common punishment suggests that the two are equal in the *degree* and *nature* of sinfulness.[76]

What makes his reductionist lumping together even more striking is that it appears in the very midst of an insightful analysis of the nuances of the concept of *nifāq*. Izutsu notes that some historical scholars have divided humanity into three groups (*muʾmin*, *kāfir*, and *munāfiq*), rather than two only (*muʾmin* and *kāfir*).[77] His response to this is not a reassertion of his binary conceptual opposition between *īmān* and *kufr*. Rather, he responds by arguing that *nifāq* is not a tightly bound category; *nifāq* is something mobile, something that overlaps with and can be born out of either *īmān* or *kufr*.[78] For Izutsu,

> *nifāq* is in no way a water-tight compartment situated between *kufr* and *īmān*, but rather an extensive range of meaning with uncertain boundaries. It is, so to speak, a category of a conspicuously dynamic nature, that may extend with elasticity towards either direction to shade off almost imperceptibly into *kufr* and *īmān*.[79]

This description appears to blatantly challenge his reduction of *nifāq* to a subset of *kufr*, as manifest in his schematization of the Qurʾānic *Weltanschauung*.

---

[75] يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

[76] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 208. Italics mine.

[77] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 207.

[78] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 121, 209-210.

[79] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 209.

It is also worth noting that Izutsu's analysis of the semantic structure of other concepts is as equally insightful as his analysis of *nifāq*. When he describes *īmān*, for example, he transcends a simple focus on belief—or even belief and action—to highlight aspects such as gratitude, humility, response to divine guidance, and fear of God (*taqwā*).[80] The complexity of his analysis of *īmān* is also evident in his description of the *muʾmin* as someone who positively affirms the four primary relationships with God.[81] As these examples illustrate, for Izutsu, *īmān* is a complex and multifaceted concept.

The complexity of his analysis of *nifāq* and *īmān* also raises intriguing questions about his comparison between the Qurʾānic worldview and the Khārijite worldview (see Diagram 3).[82] In this comparison, he describes the Qurʾānic worldview as simple, static and clear-cut. However, one wonders how this could be the case if, based on Izutsu's own analysis, *nifāq* is a concept that is dynamic and overlaps with both *īmān* and *kufr*. This would necessarily call into question his static and clearly-defined presentation of the Qurʾānic worldview. If we concede Izutsu's contention that *nifāq* is a genre of *kufr,* and we accept his semantic analysis that depicts *nifāq* as being born out of *īmān* or *kufr*, then this implies that *kufr* can exist within the sphere of *īmān*. If this is the case, Izutsu's diagram begins to look very much like the Khārijite worldview; the stability of and clear-cut delineation between the borders of *īmān* and *kufr* are called into question.

Another provocative question that arises is whether *īmān* is always confined "within the wall" of the historical and explicitly-professed Muslim community.[83] In both his diagrams of the Qurʾānic and Khārijite worldviews, Izutsu assumes that all that exists 'outside of the

[80] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 213-235.
[81] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 79.
[82] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 9.
[83] Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, 10.

wall' is *kufr*. However, if *kufr* can lose "its denotative stability and fixedness, and become something mobile," is it not possible that *īmān* can do the same?[84] This is not a question I will endeavor to answer at this juncture, but it is a question that naturally arises from Izutsu's own semantic analysis, an analysis that highlights relational meaning, overlaps, and interconnections between Qurʾānic concepts.

Based on the preceding evaluation of Izutsu's analytical conclusions, it is clear that a *Muslima* theology will not adopt his model of conceptual opposition. This model is not only inherently weak, but it is also in direct conflict with the central goal of a *Muslima* theology, that is, the attempt to conceive of difference as relational, rather than as something that divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. Likewise, a *Muslima* theology will not follow Izutsu in his ultimate reduction of complexity and his subsumption of various Qurʾānic concepts under other Qurʾānic concepts; a *Muslima* theology will aim to explore and explicate—not "disentangle"—the Qurʾān's complex, relational web.[85] A *Muslima* theology will, however, draw upon many of his insights into the structure of individual Qurʾānic categories related to religious difference.

5. Conclusion

In sum, Izutsu's method of semantic analysis provides the ideal extension to the hermeneutical approach drawn from Muslim women interpreters of the Qurʾān. With its emphasis on relational meaning, overlapping semantic fields, and multifaceted interconnections, it is well-suited to explicating the relationality that exists in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. A *Muslima* theology, therefore, will adopt his method of

[84] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52.
[85] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 42.

semantic analysis, applying it in a synchronic fashion to the more limited topic of religious difference. While a *Muslima* theology will employ his semantic methodology, it will diverge from the majority of Izutsu's analytical conclusions, including his eventual reduction of Qurʾānic concepts and his definition of those concepts as oppositional.

The semantic field mapping to be undertaken in the next part will involve analysis of the individual concepts—drawing upon components of Izutsu's own analysis as well as that of other scholars—but it will principally be concerned with the illumination of relational interconnections between the various conceptual fields. Based upon that mapping, I will distinguish between lateral and hierarchical religious difference, explore the complex relationality that exists among Qurʾānic concepts related to hierarchical religious difference, and then articulate a constructive and integrated account of religious pluralism that offers a new perspective on sameness, difference, and relationship between the two.

Chapter Seven

Lateral and Hierarchical Religious Difference in the Qurʾān

1. Introduction

Throughout this study thus far I have aimed to highlight the nature and source of two prominent shortcomings in the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious difference: the inability to account effectively for both the proximity and the otherness of the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other, and the failure to offer integrated models for understanding religious difference. In order to overcome these shortcomings, I have constructed a novel conceptual and hermeneutical infrastructure, which I will utilize in this part to re-evaluate, re-interpret, and re-envision the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

Whether it be the shared conception of difference evident in contemporary Islamic approaches (Chapter Three) or the presentation of difference critiqued by Muslim women interpreters and feminist theologians (Chapters Four and Five), difference is always the central the issue. Therefore, in order to move the discourse in new directions, we must start with difference. The subsequent chapters will involve three primary tasks. First, I will begin by distinguishing between hierarchical and lateral religious difference in the Qurʾān, and challenging the static and holistic alignment of the two genres of difference. Second, I will examine the dynamic and complex relationship that exists within the genre of hierarchical difference, arguing against conceptual opposition, conceptual subsumption, and discrete boundaries. Third, I will utilize insights garnered from the two initial tasks in order to articulate an integrated model of Qurʾānic religious difference, a model that aims to re-weave

creation, revelation, lateral difference, and hierarchal difference into a coherent—although complex and at times ambiguous—account.

In this chapter, I will carry out the first of these tasks. Briefly revisiting Barlas' distinction between hierarchical and lateral difference, I will explicitly outline a series of defining characteristics for each genre. I will then utilize these characteristics to differentiate between the two genres within the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference and to argue that, although they intersect with each other, hierarchical and lateral religious difference are primarily associated with two distinct semantic fields, the semantic field of *taqwā* and the semantic field of *umma*. I will conclude by exploring the intersections between the two semantic fields, and challenging the automatic and complete ascription of a particular evaluation to a particular religious community.

I will carry out this analysis in a synchronic fashion, rather than in a diachronic fashion. Like Izutsu, I will treat the Qurʾānic text as a unified whole expressing an overarching *Weltanschauung*. As a result, I will not endeavor to trace the chronological development of specific concepts throughout various periods in the Qurʾānic revelation. While such analysis is capable of offering unique insights, it also faces two main obstacles. The first is that the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) are not completely known. Thus, chronological analysis is dependent upon the assumption that *āyāt* that deal with similar themes are from similar periods of revelation. The second obstacle is that, once canonized, the Qurʾānic text functions as a unified whole for the Muslim community. While *asbāb al-nuzūl* retain great importance within the community, especially in terms of legal contextualization, by and large the text is not treated as though the latest revelations are the only ones that should be followed.

2. Defining Characteristics of Hierarchical and Lateral Difference

Barlas draws a distinction between difference that differentiates laterally and difference that differentiates hierarchically.[1] Her main contention is that sexual difference must be acknowledged—not ignored or downplayed—but that it never serves as the basis of hierarchical evaluation. In other words, for Barlas, sexual difference is lateral difference; it is difference that distinguishes groups without attaching an evaluative measure to that distinction. Moreover, she states that in the Qurʾān lateral difference is conceived of as divinely-intended, and therefore, purposeful. Apart from this non-evaluative form of difference, Barlas identifies another genre of difference, hierarchical difference, which *is* associated with evaluation and assessment. According to Barlas—and Wadud—hierarchical difference is evaluated only with respect to the concept of *taqwā* (piety).[2] *Taqwā*, while something that must be actualized in social and relational contexts, is assessed on an individual basis. In arguing for the distinction between these two genres of difference, Barlas aims to illuminate and dismiss the pervasive conflation and static linking of the two; lateral and hierarchical difference are not the same, and no particular hierarchical assessment of *taqwā* is permanently or ascribed to a lateral group as a whole.

On the basis of Barlas' distinction, it is possible to identify defining characteristics for both genres of difference. First, hierarchical difference is connected with accountability, judgment, rewards, and punishments. Second, evaluation of this genre of difference is carried out only on the basis of conformity or non-conformity with the concept of *taqwā*. Third, the evaluation of *taqwā*—and therefore of hierarchical difference—is assessed on the individual level. It is, however, always connected to social and relational manifestations. In other words,

[1] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 145.
[2] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 143; Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 37.

every person is assessed individually, but that assessment is integrally related to the individual's interactions with others, both divine and human.

There are also three defining characteristics of lateral difference. First, lateral difference is a group phenomenon. It does not primarily refer to individual particularities, but rather to patterns and trends of difference at the group level. The fact that lateral difference is a group phenomenon, however, does not mean that lateral groups are completely discrete; groupings that denote lateral difference can overlap, intersect and even be inclusive of other lateral groups. Second, lateral difference is divinely-intended. Lateral difference, therefore, is not the result of degeneration, human error, or corruption. It is willed by God for a teleological purpose and, as such, should not be targeted for eradication or homogenization. Third, lateral difference never serves as the basis of evaluation. Evaluation is not tied to difference that is divinely-intended.[3] Moreover, evaluation is not conducted at the group level. It is important to clarify that this does not mean that there will be no evaluation whatsoever within groups of lateral difference; rather, it implies that a singular evaluation will not be uniformly ascribed to an entire group solely on the basis of membership in that group. As a result, in seeking to identify groups of lateral religious difference, the goal is not to find groups that are never evaluated, but rather groups that are partially and diversely evaluated.

3. Hierarchical Religious Difference: The Semantic Field of Taqwā

As is evident from Izutsu's analysis of the central concepts of the Islamic worldview, as well as in other historical and contemporary approaches discussed in this study, the concepts

[3] While I will not discuss this within the current study, evaluation based upon something that is willed by God prompts serious and intricate questions related to pre-determinism, free will and moral accountability. These questions have caused much debate throughout Islamic discourse. See Dmitry V. Frolov, "Freedom and Predestination," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, 267; L. Gardet, "al-Ḳaḍā; Wa 'l-ḳadar," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 4, 365.

of *īmān* (faith), *islām* (submission), *kufr* (disbelief), and *nifāq* (hypocrisy)[4] undeniably play a central role in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. Moreover, while Izutsu's depiction of the Qurʾānic worldview is compromised due to its oversimplification, he does illustrate that these concepts are connected to notions of accountability, judgment, rewards and punishments. The Qurʾān provides extensive descriptions of the *muʾmin* and the *muslim* as those who will be rewarded with Paradise:

> *But as for those who believe* (āmanū) *and do good deeds, their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Streams will flow at their feet in the Gardens of Bliss. Their prayer in them will be, 'Glory be to You, God!', their greeting, 'Peace,' and the last part of their prayer, 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.'*[5]

> *In fact, any who submit* (ʾaslama) *themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[6]

In contrast, there are equally as many—if not more—Qurʾānic descriptions of the *kāfir* and *munāfiq* as those who will be punished with the Fire of Hell:

> *We shall send those who reject Our revelations* (kafarū) *to the Fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain: God is mighty and wise.*[7]

> *The hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them.*[8]

> *God will punish the hypocrites and the associators, both men and women,* (munāfiqūn/ munāfiqāt *and* mushrikīn/mushrikāt) *and turn with mercy to the believers, both men and women* (muʾminīn *and* muʾmināt)*: God is most forgiving, most merciful.*[9]

---

[4] From this point forward, I will use the italicized transliteration of these terms as verbal nouns (ex. *īmān*, *islām*, *kufr*, *nifāq*) or active participles (ex. *muʾmin*, *muslim*, *kāfir*, *munāfiq*). For concepts that are introduced after this juncture, I will indicate the proximate English meaning and alternate form in brackets at the first occurrence. Thereafter, I will utilize only the transliteration.

[5] Qurʾān 10:9-10: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الصَّالِحَاتِ يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِإِيمَانِهِمْ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ الأَنْهَارُ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ دَعْوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلاَمٌ وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

[6] Qurʾān 2:112: بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِندَ رَبِّهِ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

[7] Qurʾān 4:56: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِآيَاتِنَا سَوْفَ نُصْلِيهِمْ نَارًا كُلَّمَا نَضِجَتْ جُلُودُهُمْ بَدَّلْنَاهُمْ جُلُودًا غَيْرَهَا لِيَذُوقُواْ الْعَذَابَ إِنَّ اللّهَ كَانَ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

[8] Qurʾān 4:145: إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الدَّرْكِ الأَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا

[9] Qurʾān 33:73: لِيُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ وَيَتُوبَ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

The direct association of these concepts—along with other similar concepts, including *shirk* (associationism, *mushrik*)—with ultimate judgment is enough to indicate that these concepts denote forms of hierarchal religious difference. Their status as forms of hierarchical difference is further confirmed by the fact that they are consistently praised or critiqued even without explicit reference to rewards and punishment:

> *The believers, both men and women,* (muʾminūn *and* muʾmināt) *support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such* people: God is almighty and wise.[10]
>
> *Who could be better in religion than those who submit* (ʾaslama) *themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith* (ḥanīf)*? …*[11]
>
> *The worst creatures in the sight of God are those who reject* (kafarū) *Him and will not believe.*[12]
>
> *The hypocrites, both men and women,* (munāfiqūn *and* munāfiqāt) *are all the same: they order what is wrong and forbid what is right; they are tight-fisted. They have ignored God, so He has ignored them. The hypocrites are the disobedient ones.*[13]
>
> *Say, 'Do you order me to worship someone other than God, you foolish people?'* [65]*It has already been revealed to you [Prophet] and to those before you: 'If you ascribe any partner* (ʾashrakta) *to God, all your work will come to nothing: you will be one if the losers. No! Worship God alone and be one of those who are grateful to Him.'*[14]

In his analysis of these concepts, Izutsu depicts *īmān* and *kufr* as the focus-words of two intersecting semantic fields. Consequently, *kufr* acts as a negative key-term in the semantic field of *īmān*, and *īmān* likewise acts as a negative (meaning opposite) key-term in the semantic

---

[10] Qurʾān 9:71:
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاء بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُوْلَـئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللّهُ إِنَّ اللّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

[11] Qurʾān 4:125 (excerpt): وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لله وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ واتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا …
While Izutsu defines *ḥanīf* as non-denominational monotheist, I have not used that translation in this chapter; rather, I have used 'true in faith' or 'upright' in order to indicate the relational meaning of the term. I will explore this relational meaning in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

[12] Qurʾān 8:55: إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِندَ اللّهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَهُمْ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ

[13] Qurʾān 9:67: الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ بَعْضُهُم مِّن بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمُنكَرِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَقْبِضُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ نَسُواْ اللّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

[14] Qurʾān 39:64-66: قُلْ أَفَغَيْرَ اللّهِ تَأْمُرُونِّي أَعْبُدُ أَيُّهَا الْجَاهِلُونَ
وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ
بَلِ اللّهَ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُن مِّنْ الشَّاكِرِينَ

field of *kufr*.[15] Izutsu states that these concepts form the "two pillars of Qurʾanic ethics"[16] around which all other concepts, positive and negative, revolve. There is certainly much to be garnered from Izutsu's presentation of the semantic situatedness of these concepts. Even the limited Qurʾānic *āyāt* presented so far in this chapter indicate that *īmān* and *kufr* are central and, in many ways, antithetical concepts. However, as with his conception of the overarching Qurʾānic worldview, his analysis of *īmān* and *kufr*—not to mention all of the other concepts that are subsumed within these two—is constrained by the fact that he depicts them as exact opposites and wholly antithetical. *Kufr*, therefore, becomes simply what *īmān* is not, and *īmān* becomes what *kufr* is not. This is evident when, after carrying out his analysis of the inner structure and semantic field of *kufr*, Izutsu states,

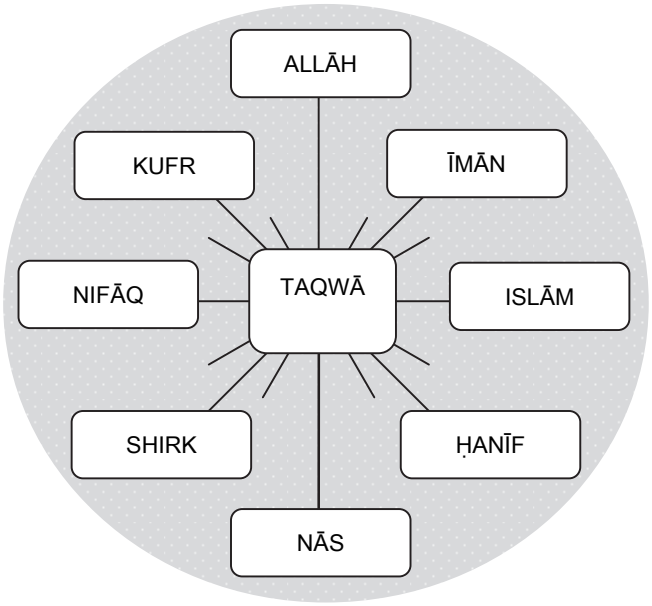
> As for the semantic structure of 'belief' itself, it may be admitted that we know already all the essential points, for, by trying to analyze semantically the principal terms of negative valuation, we have also been describing the characteristic features of the true 'believer' in the Islamic sense from the reverse side, as it were. So our main task ... will consist simply in re-examining briefly all that has been said about *kufr* and its various aspects from the opposite angle.[17]

While a degree of oppositional overlap between these concepts is clear, they are not simply the inverse of one another, and their depiction as such impedes examination of the nuances and complexities of each. Izutsu's schema of conceptual opposition is far too neat to explicate these in a sustained fashion.

[15] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 22-25.
[16] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 297.
[17] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 213.

In light of this, and in line with Barlas' definition of the central characteristics of hierarchical difference, I propose that *īmān* and *kufr* should be reconceived as two concepts, among others, that define the semantic field of *taqwā* (Diagram 4). This reconceptualization of the semantic relationship of these two concepts is not intended to dismiss the majority of Izutsu's analysis of these concepts,[18] nor does it imply that these terms are no longer focus-words. Both *īmān* and *kufr* remain focus-words of their own—highly significant—semantic fields, as well as key-terms within other fields. This reconceptualization, however, is intended to deconstruct the absolute oppositional characterization of the concepts. *Īmān* and *kufr* are no longer primarily understood through inverse comparison; the complexity of these concepts is now illuminated thorough reference to and comparison with a third core concept, *taqwā*. Additionally, other concepts that denote hierarchical religious difference—such as *islām*, *ḥanīf*, *nifāq*, and *shirk*—are no longer subsumed in a secondary status under the dual "pillars" of *īmān* and *kufr*. These concepts certainly retain a direct relationship with the former pillars, but they now are also interpreted directly in relation to *taqwā* and represent focus-words of their own semantic fields.

Diagram 4



HIERARCHICAL RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE:
SEMANTIC FIELD OF *TAQWĀ*

[18] It is worth reiterating that Izutsu himself is forthcoming about a degree of arbitrariness in the selection of focus-words and key-terms and in the mapping of semantic fields. (See Izutsu, *God and Man*, 18.)

It is important to acknowledge that this *taqwā*-centric reconceptualization is also tied to the difference in focus between this study and Izutsu's work. I have magnified and ascribed greater significance to certain concepts due to their pivotal role in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference. In Izutsu's analysis, for example, the concept of *ḥanīf* warrants limited consideration as a facet of *īmān*.[19] Yet, in the current study, *ḥanīf*—despite its limited use within the Qurʾānic text[20]—is a pivotal concept and so is treated as a focus-word.

The exploration of the complex web of relationships formed by the semantic field of *taqwā* is the subject of Chapter Eight. Here, I will examine the inner structure of the concept of *taqwā* itself and its central role in the Qurʾānic discourse. What is *taqwā*, and why is it important? Additionally, does *taqwā*—and by extension the concepts that inhabit its semantic field—fulfill Barlas' third defining characteristic of hierarchical difference; that is, does it evaluate on the individual level in reference to social relationships?

Up until this point, I have translated *taqwā* as piety. However, this translation falls short in that it does not convey many of the key intricacies of the concept, nor its paramount significance. *Taqwā* is piety, but piety is devotion to God, awe of God, mindfulness or consciousness of God, worship of God, and even fear of God. Highlighting the importance of *taqwā* within the Qurʾānic worldview, *Sūrat al-baqara* begins by offering a sketch of the *muttaqūn* (those who manifest *taqwā*):

> *That is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God* (muttaqīn)*, who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give, those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muḥammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter. Such people are following their Lord's guidance and it is they who will prosper.*[21]

[19] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 221-223.
[20] *Ḥanīf*, or its plural form *ḥunafāʾ*, appears only twelve times within the Qurʾān.
[21] Qurʾān 2:2-5:
ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لاَ رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

The divine scripture (*kitāb*) is guidance for the *muttaqūn*, and the *muttaqūn* are those who believe in God, in what they cannot know from their own experience, in revelation, and in the Hereafter. With regard to the Hereafter and other eschatological realities, *taqwā* conveys a sense of fear of God.[22] In this capacity, the Qurʾān links *taqwā* with the term *khashiya* (fear) and describes the *muttaqūn* as those whose hearts tremble when they reflect on God's eschatological plan:

> *... those who are mindful of God* (muttaqīn)*, those who stand in awe* (yakhshawna) *of their Lord, though He is unseen, and who fear the Hour.*[23]

> *Those who stand in awe* (khashyati) *of their Lord, who believe in His messages, who do not ascribe partners to Him, who always give with hearts that tremble at the thought that they must return to Him, are the ones who race toward good things, and they will be the first to get them. We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear —We have a Record that tells the truth— they will not be wronged.*[24]

However, as the preceding *āyāt* indicate, *taqwā* is not only about belief; the *muttaqūn* also perform actions. They pray, give and race towards good things. Therefore, as Wadud states, *taqwā* is both attitude and action; it is "a pious manner of behavior which observes constraints ... and 'consciousness of Allah,' that is, observing that manner of behavior because of one's reverence towards Allah."[25]

The seemingly routine activities of praying and giving also draw attention to another fundamental feature of *taqwā*. *Taqwā* is not only manifest—whether in belief or action—in relationship to God, it is also manifest in relation to other humans. *Taqwā* is manifest socially;

والَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ
أُوْلَـئِكَ عَلَى هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

[22] Izutsu focuses only on this aspect of *taqwā*, and explores its relationship with *khashya* and *khawf*. (See Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 223-232.)

[23] Qurʾān 21:48-49 (excerpt):
... لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَهُم مِّنَ السَّاعَةِ مُشْفِقُونَ

[24] Qurʾān 23:57-62:
وَالَّذِينَ هُم بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ
الَّذِينَ هُم مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِم مُّشْفِقُونَ
وَالَّذِينَ هُم بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ
وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوا وَّقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجِلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ رَاجِعُونَ
أُوْلَئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ
وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَابٌ يَنطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

[25] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 37.

it involves "both responsibility to God and to humankind."[26] As such, *taqwā* denotes an integral connection between the vertical relationship of humans to God and the horizontal relationship of humans to humans. (In Diagram 4, I have indicated the importance of both of these relationships by including both Allāh and *nās* [humankind/people] in the semantic field of *taqwā*.) The connection between these two relationships is also evident in the common association of *taqwā* with *birr* (goodness, piety):[27]

> *... Goodness* (al-birr) *does not consist of entering houses by the back [door]; the truly good person* (al-birr) *is the one who is mindful of God* (ʾittaqā)*. So enter your houses by their [main] doors and be mindful* (ʾattaqū) *of God so that you may prosper.*[28]

At first encounter, this *āya* is somewhat jarring in its repetition of the concepts of *birr* and *taqwā* in the middle of a discussion of proper social etiquette, but it is precisely this intimate connection that defines the character of *taqwā*. *Taqwā* is an orientation towards God, a constant awareness of God, that colors every facet of how one acts in the world. This intimate connection between the relationship with God and social relationships is confirmed in another *āya* from *Sūrat al-baqara*:

> *True goodness* (*al-birr*) *does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God* (muttaqūn)*.*[29]

There exists a particularly close connection between *taqwā* and familial or kinship relationships:

---

[26] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 87.
[27] Leah Kinberg, "Piety," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4, 9.
[28] Qurʾān 2:189: ... وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوْاْ الْبُيُوتَ مِن ظُهُورِهَا وَلَـكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى وَأْتُواْ الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ
[29] Qurʾān 2:177:
لَّيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَـكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَالْمَلآئِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُواْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاء والضَّرَّاء وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَـئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

> *People, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from the same essence created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship: God is always watching over you.*[30]

In other *āyāt* that do not specifically reference *taqwā* but refer to the command of God, a similar motif is evident. Moreover, these verses link the reverence due to parents and due to God with *shukr* (gratitude). Humans are commanded to respect and obey their parents as an acknowledgement of the favors that God has bestowed upon them:

> *We have commanded man to be good to his parents: his mother struggled to carry him and struggled to give birth to him—his bearing and weaning took a full thirty months. When he has grown to manhood and reached the age of forty he [may] say, 'Lord, help me to be truly grateful* (ʾashkura) *for Your favors to me and to my parents; help me to do good work that pleases You; make my offspring good. I turn to You; I am one of those who devote themselves to You.'*[31]

The Qurʾān, however, makes an important caveat with regard to the intertwining of *taqwā* with social and familial relations. One should show gratitude and endeavor to maintain proper relations, but in situations where social or familial ties interfere—or threaten to interfere—with one's relationship with God, the relationship with God takes precedence:

> *We have commanded people to be good to their parents: their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and to your parents—all will return to Me. If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done.*[32]

> *We have commanded people to be good to their parents, but do not obey them if they strive to make you serve, beside Me, anything of which you have no knowledge: you will all return to Me, and I shall inform you of what you have done.*[33]

---

[30] Qurʾān 4:1: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالاً كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاء وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءلُونَ بِهِ وَالأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

[31] Qurʾān 46:15: وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا حَتَّى إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً قَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَى وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي إِنِّي تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

[32] Qurʾān 31:14-15: وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ
وَإِن جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَى أَن تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبْهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

[33] Qurʾān 29:8: وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِن جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

In other words, *taqwā* is the interconnection between the vertical and horizontal relationships, but it is the vertical relationship between humans and God that is the defining relationship. When the opposite occurs—when the horizontal relationship between humans begins to define or impact the vertical relationship—the Qurʾān reasserts the preeminence of the vertical relationship. It is important to note that these *āyāt* do not advocate the complete severing of relationships; a person can and should still show gratitude and kindness towards their family, but they should not obey them with respect to erroneous beliefs or practices.

Another central trait of *taqwā* is that it is not simply something that can be achieved once and for all; rather, it is an active quality. As such, it is something that must be constantly striven for and sustained, not simply achieved or professed. This is corroborated by the sheer volume of Qurʾānic exhortations to have *taqwā*, to be conscious of God. The status of *taqwā* as an active and dynamic quality is also confirmed by the fact that many of these exhortations are made in reference to those who believe, the *muʾminūn*. The Qurʾān constantly invokes the imperative, reminding them to be conscious of God:

> *You who believe* (āmanū)*, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God* (tattaqūn)*.*[34]
>
> *You who believe* (āmanū)*, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God: give up any outstanding dues from usury, if you are true believers* (muʾminīn)*.*[35]
>
> *You who believe* (āmanū)*, be steadfast, more steadfast than others; be ready; always be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God, so that you may prosper.*[36]
>
> *You who believe* (āmanū)*, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God, seek ways to come closer to Him and strive for His cause, so that you may prosper.*[37]
>
> *Those who believe* (āmanū) *and do good deeds will not be blamed for what they may have consumed as long as they are mindful of God* (ʾittaqū)*, believe* (āmanū) *and do*

[34] Qurʾān 2:183: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

[35] Qurʾān 2:278: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ اتَّقُواْ اللّهَ وَذَرُواْ مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

[36] Qurʾān 3:200: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ اصْبِرُواْ وَصَابِرُواْ وَرَابِطُواْ وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

[37] Qurʾān 5:35: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ اتَّقُواْ اللّهَ وَابْتَغُواْ إِلَيهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُواْ فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

> *good deeds, then are mindful of God* (ʾittaqū) *and believe* (āmanū)*, then are mindful of God* (ʾittaqū) *and do good: God loves those who do good.*[38]

The last two *āyāt* highlight the fact that there is always a way to move closer to God, to increase one's level or degree of *taqwā*. Qurʾān 5:93, in particular, describes iterations of this ongoing process: be mindful of God, believe, do good deeds, and then become more mindful and develop more belief, and then become more mindful and do more good deeds, and on and on. It is a cycle that knows no limit and continues until the point of death.

While many *āyāt* related to *taqwā* are addressed to the *muʾminūn*, the general command to strive for *taqwā* is directed indiscriminately to all *nās*, to all of humanity:

> *O People, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing.*[39]

Moreover, as both Barlas and Wadud note, *taqwā* is the primary criterion by which humanity is judged; the most honored people in the sight of God are those who are most mindful:

> *People, we created you all from a single man and a single woman and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him* (ʾatqākum)*. God is all knowing, all aware.*[40]

This *āya* is highly significant not only because it identifies *taqwā* as the criterion by which God judges between people, but also because it juxtaposes *taqwā* with other forms of difference. The *āya* clearly states that humanity is divided by God into nations and tribes, but that these divisions are not the basis of evaluation. The only basis of evaluation is *taqwā*. While lateral difference is the subject of the subsequent section, it is worth noting that the distinction between nations/tribes and *taqwā* is a patent example of the distinction between lateral and

[38] Qurʾān 5:93: لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعِمُواْ إِذَا مَا اتَّقَواْ وَّآمَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الصَّالِحَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَواْ وَّآمَنُواْ ثُمَّ اتَّقَواْ وَّأَحْسَنُواْ وَاللّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

[39] Qurʾān 22:1: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ

[40] Qurʾān 49:13: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

hierarchical difference. Lateral difference exists by God's intention and is not the basis of evaluation; hierarchical difference is the only evaluative standard.

Wadud draws attention to the fact that Qurʾān 49:13 is preceded by two *āyāt* that criticize groups that jeer at one another, taunting each other on the basis of group affiliation:

> *Believers* (ya ʾayyuhā alladhīna āmanū)*, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behavior are evildoers. Believers* (ya ʾayyuhā alladhīna āmanū)*, avoid making too many assumptions—some assumptions are sinful—and do not spy on one another or speak ill of people behind their backs: would any of you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother? No, you would hate it. So be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God: God is ever relenting, most merciful.*[41]

Wadud argues that when Qurʾān 49:13 is read in the context of these *āyāt*, *taqwā* as the decisive criterion is not only distinguished from national or tribal difference, but from all sorts of group difference. In other words, value is only ascribed to *taqwā*, not group identity. Wadud contends that "one might attribute greater or lesser value to another on the basis of gender, wealth, nationality, religion or race, but from Allah's perspective, these do not form a valuable basis for distinction between individuals (or groups)."[42]

Following Wadud's assertion, it is not surprising that judgment on the basis of *taqwā* is only carried out on the individual level:

> *People, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of your Lord and fear a Day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way. God's promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you, nor let the Deceiver delude you about God.*[43]

On the Day of Judgment, not even a child or parent—the closest of human relations—will be able to trade places with each other; no person will be able to save another, nor will any

---

[41] Qurʾān 49:11-12:
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَومٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَى أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاء مِّن نِّسَاء عَسَى أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الِاسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

[42] Wadud, *Qurʾan and Woman*, 37.

[43] Qurʾān 31:33: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَاخْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَّا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَن وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَن وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغَرُورُ

person be held accountable for another. The invocation of kinship relationships in this *āya* reiterates the fact that, while *taqwā* connects the vertical (human to God) and horizontal (human to human) relationships, ultimately the human to God relationship—or more precisely the individual to God relationship—will be the determining factor. This emphasis on individual accountability and assessment is confirmed in many other Qurʾānic *āyāt*:

> *You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance; you will all return to God, and He will make you realize what you have done.*[44]

> *... Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences.*[45]

> *The Hour is coming—though I choose to keep it hidden—for each soul to be rewarded for its labor.*[46]

> *Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds.*[47]

The convergence of the universal and egalitarian command to have *taqwā* with the emphasis on individual accountability implies that every individual has both the potential to manifest *taqwā* and the responsibility to manifest *taqwā*.[48] Those who constantly strive to fulfill this potential and responsibility are promised the Garden, and those who do not are promised the Fire:

> *Here is a picture of the Garden that those mindful of God* (muttaqūn) *have been promised: flowing streams and perpetual food and shade. This is the reward that awaits those who are mindful of God; the disbelievers' reward is the Fire.*[49]

The eschatological endpoints outlined in this *āya* also indicate that *taqwā* is situated in a positive relationship with certain concepts that fall within its semantic field, and in a negative

---

[44] Qurʾān 5:105: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنفُسَكُمْ لاَ يَضُرُّكُم مَّن ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ إِلَى اللّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

[45] Qurʾān 6:164 (excerpt): ... وَلاَ تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلاَّ عَلَيْهَا وَلاَ تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى ثُمَّ إِلَى رَبِّكُم مَّرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[46] Qurʾān 20:15: إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ ءَاتِيَةٌ أَكَادُ أُخْفِيهَا لِتُجْزَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا تَسْعَى

[47] Qurʾān 74:38: كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ

[48] Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 144.

[49] Qurʾān 13:35: مَّثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الأَنْهَارُ أُكُلُهَا دَآئِمٌ وِظِلُّهَا تِلْكَ عُقْبَى الَّذِينَ اتَّقَواْ وَّعُقْبَى الْكَافِرِينَ النَّارُ

relationship with others. This *āya* itself contrasts the *muttaqūn* with the *kāfirūn*. Qurʾān 31:15, which has already been discussed, similarly contrasts *taqwā* with *shirk* when it states that children should not obey their parents "if they strive to make you associate" anything with God.[50] Conversely, *taqwā* is positively associated with concepts such as *īmān* and *islām*. This is evident in the preceding *āyāt* directed to the *muʾminūn*, as well as in other *āyāt* that either directly connect *taqwā* and those concepts, or indirectly do so through references to actions and beliefs that are characteristic of *taqwā*:

> *You who believe* (āmanū)*, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God, as is His due, and do not die except as one who has submitted him or herself to God* (muslimūn)*.*[51]
>
> *For men and women who are devoted to God* (muslimūn *and* muslimāt)*—believing men and women* (muʾminūn *and* muʾmināt)*, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often—God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.*[52]
>
> In Qurʾān 30:30-30:32, *taqwā* is linked with the concept of *ḥanīf*:
>
> *So as a person of pure faith, stand firm and true* (ḥanīfan) *in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition* (fiṭra) *God instilled in mankind—there is no altering God's creation—and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it. Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of Him; keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe partners to God, those who divide their unity into factions, with each party rejoicing in their own.*[53]

In addition to demonstrating that *ḥanīf* is situated in a positive relationship with *taqwā* (i.e., being *ḥanīf* is a manifestation of *taqwā*), this *āya* also reiterates the critique that is lodged against those that prioritize group divisions above all else; the *āya* classifies those who divide into *ḥizb* (factions) with those who engage in *shirk*.

---

[50] Qurʾān 31:15 (excerpt): وَإِن جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَى أَن تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ...

[51] Qurʾān 3:102: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ اتَّقُواْ اللّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلاَ تَمُوتُنَّ إِلاَّ وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ

[52] Qurʾān 33:35:
إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

[53] Qurʾān 30:30-32: فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيَعًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

Significantly, this *āya* also connects *taqwā* with *fiṭra*, or human nature. The natural disposition instilled in each person by God is to be *ḥanīf*, to be fully devoted to and conscious of God. This disposition is confirmed by a description of the human soul as having knowledge of *taqwā*:

> *By the soul and how He formed it and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety* (taqwā)*!*[54]

Knowledge of *taqwā* and a natural disposition towards God are, therefore, characteristics of all humanity. However, as already indicated, *taqwā* is something that is dynamic and active, something that must be constantly actualized. In order to facilitate this actualization, the Qurʾān indicates that God provides natural *āyāt* (signs) and revelation delivered through messengers.[55] *Sūrat al-dhāriyāt*, for example, relates the rewards of the *muttaqūn* with the *yaqīn* (certainty of faith) that results from contemplating natural *āyāt*:

> *Those who are mindful of God* (muttaqūn) *will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before: sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for God's forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived. On earth there are signs* (āyāt) *for those with sure faith* (*mūqinīn*)*—and in yourselves too, do you not see?—in the sky is your sustenance and all that you are promised.*[56]

In another instance where *yaqīn* is linked with natural *āyāt*, it is made explicit that such signs are intended for people to reflect upon, for people to contemplate using reason:

> *There are signs* (āyāt) *in the heavens and the earth for those who believe: in the creation of you, in the creatures God scattered on earth, there are signs for people of sure faith* (mūqinīn)*; in the alternation of night and day, in the rain God provides, sending it down*

---

[54] Qurʾān 91:7-8:
وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

[55] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Others Faiths*, 83.

[56] Qurʾān 51:15-22:
إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ
آخِذِينَ مَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ
كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ
وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ
وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ
وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِّلْمُوقِنِينَ
وَفِي أَنفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ
وَفِي السَّمَاءِ رِزْقُكُمْ وَمَا تُوعَدُونَ

> *from the sky and reviving the dead earth with it, and in His shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason* (yaʿqilūn).[57]

Reason, of course, as a human faculty is something that is instilled by God in all humanity through creation; thus, it is integrally associated with *fiṭra*. Every human is created not only with a soul that knows *taqwā*, and a *fiṭra* that is disposed towards *taqwā*, but also with the capacity to reflect rationally upon the *āyāt* of God that are readily available in the natural world.

Yet, this is not the end of the story. As indicated, God provides still another means by which humans are called to manifest *taqwā*: exhortations and guidance from revelation and messengers. *Sūrat al-shuʿarāʾ* makes this obvious. The *sūra* offers brief accounts of many messengers, and each account ends with the respective prophets calling their people to manifest *taqwā*:

> *Their brother Noah said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God* (tattaqūn)*? I am a faithful messenger sent to you: be mindful of God* (ʾattaqū) *and obey me.*[58]
>
> *Their brother Hud said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God* (tattaqūn)*? I am a faithful messenger sent to you: be mindful of God* (ʾattaqū) *and obey me.*[59]
>
> *Their brother Salih said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God* (*tattaqūn*)*? I am a faithful messenger to you: be mindful of God* (ʾattaqū) *and obey me.*[60]
>
> *Their brother Lot said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God* (tattaqūn)*? I am a faithful messenger to you: be mindful of God* (ʾattaqū) *and obey me.*[61]

God designs humans with an orientation towards *taqwā* and the capacity to actualize *taqwā*, and then provides reminders of and guidance towards *taqwā*. It is imperative to recognize that *taqwā* does not only derive from one of these means. In other words, *taqwā* is not something

---

[57] Qurʾān 45:3-5: إِنَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُّ مِن دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ
وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِن رِّزْقٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَاحِ آيَاتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

[58] Qurʾān 26:106-108: إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ نُوحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

[59] Qurʾān 26:124-126: إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ هُودٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

[60] Qurʾān 26:142-144: إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ صَالِحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

[61] Qurʾān 26:161-163: إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ لُوطٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

that can only be arrived at through revelation. The example of Abraham, which I will examine in the next chapter, is indicative of this. On the other hand, the fact that *taqwā* is associated with creation and *fiṭra* should not lead to the erroneous and relativist conclusion that all humans have *taqwā*. All humans have an equal capacity with respect to *taqwā*, but not all humans manifest *taqwā* equally.[62] There is equality of potentiality but diversity of actualization.

Based on the preceding exploration, two things are clear. First, *taqwā* is a concept of great significance within the Qurʾān. Second, *taqwā* displays the defining characteristics of hierarchal difference as outlined by Barlas. *Taqwā* is evaluative, assessed individually, and manifest in the social context as well in relation to God.

4. Lateral Religious Difference: The Semantic Field of Umma

In addition to the concepts that inhabit the semantic field of *taqwā*, the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference also involves numerous references to various groups, including the Sabians (*al-ṣābiʾūn*), Magians (*al-majūs*, commonly translated as Zoroastrians), Jews (*alladhīna hādū,* or *al-yahūd*), Children of Israel (*Banī Isrāʾīl*), Nazarenes (*al-naṣārā*, commonly translated as Christians), and the People of the Scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*):[63]

> *As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Nazarenes, the Magians, and the associators, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God witnesses all things.*[64]

---

[62] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Others Faiths*, 132-133.

[63] I will use the term Nazarenes throughout as a translation of the Arabic *al-Naṣārā*, since the label Christians de-problematizes and obscures the debates that surround the identity of this community, debates that include whether the term *al-Naṣārā* derives from the name of a geographical locale (i.e., Nazareth) or whether it derives from the description of Jesus' disciples as the helpers of Jesus (i.e., the *anṣār*, those who *naṣara*). While there is a definite connection between the Qurʾānic Nazarenes and the group called Christians, it is not the same term. (See McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 94-98; Sidney H. Griffith, "Christians and Christianity," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, 307.)

[64] Qurʾān 22:27: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

> *Those who believe, the Jews, the Nazarenes, and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their reward with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[65]
>
> *We told the Children of Israel, 'Live in the land, and when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, We shall bring you to the assembly of all people.'*[66]
>
> *Some of the People of the Scripture believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price. These people will have their reward with their Lord: God is swift in reckoning.*[67]

In examining the Qurʾānic discourse, many scholars have attempted to argue that the *taqwā*-related concepts are associated completely and exclusively with specific groups. For instance, Ibn Kathīr's exegesis of the concept of *islām* (submission) unequivocally links the concept only with the historical community of Muḥammad.[68] Izutsu makes a similar move when he presents the conceptual opposition between *īmān* (faith) and *kufr* (disbelief) as corresponding exactly to the conceptual opposition between the Muslim community (the followers of Muḥammad)[69] and non-Muslim 'others.'[70]

A few scholars, however, have sought to challenge the idea that Qurʾānic concepts are applicable to particular identifiable groups. Following W. C. Smith, Aydin argues that the term *islām* does not refer to the "concrete forms" of a particular religious community but to a more general notion of faith.[71] However, he does not maintain this distinction between the Qurʾānic terms and groups that they might identify, since he states that the concept of *īmān* is

---

This is the only Qurʾānic reference to the Magians. There are two other references to the Sabians (Qurʾān 2:62 and 5:69). The other communities are discussed much more extensively and in greater detail.

[65] Qurʾān 2:62: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَالَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحاً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

[66] Qurʾān 17:104: وَقُلْنَا مِن بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اسْكُنُواْ الأَرْضَ فَإِذَا جَاء وَعْدُ الآخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا

[67] Qurʾan 3:199: وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَن يُؤْمِنُ بِاللّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلّهِ لاَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلاً أُوْلَـئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

[68] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, *ad* Qurʾān 3:19, 5:3. See also, Smith, *Historical and Semantic Study*, 132-133.

[69] From this point forward, it is important to distinguish between the usage of Islam and Muslim to denote a particular community (the community of Muḥammad) and members of that community, and the usage of *islām* and *muslim* to denote the Qurʾānic concepts. I will discuss the intersections of these throughout the remainder of this study, but I will retain the distinction using capitalized, un-italicized letters for the communal references and lower case, italicized transliterations for the conceptual references.

[70] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 96.

[71] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 339.

expressive of the particular concrete forms and practices of the Muslim community.[72] A more thorough and intentional distinction is made by Esack when he rails against the depiction of these concepts, both positive and negative, as "entrenched qualities" of specific communities;[73]

> One cannot hold hostage to the ethos of *kufr* which characterized their forebears, those who, by accident of birth, are a part of any group, nor others who subsequently emerge from it; nor can we do this to individuals who existed within that group, but were non-participants in *kufr*. Similarly, one cannot attribute the faith commitment and faith of preceding generations of *muslims* to contemporary Muslims.[74]

Esack's critique resonates with Barlas' argument about the distinction between categories of hierarchical evaluation and those of lateral differentiation. He stresses that the evaluations associated with *kufr* and *islām* are not organically and permanently connected with particular groups, and that individuals within groups may variously manifest *kufr* or *islām*. Building upon Esack's distinction, in this section, I will argue that these groups are manifestations of lateral religious difference. They are not only of a different genre than the concepts signifying hierarchical religious difference, but they are also associated with a distinct semantic field, the semantic field of *umma*.

As groups, the Sabians, Magians, Jews, Children of Israel, Nazarenes, and the People of the Scripture plainly fulfill the first characteristic of lateral difference; they denote difference that exists on a collective level rather than on the individual level. These groups, however, are not all of the same sort, nor are they all mutually exclusive. Some, for example, overlap with one another. Qurʾānic descriptions of the Children of Israel primarily revolve around Moses, the Israelites of his time, his interactions with Pharaoh, and the Exodus.[75] As such, they form

[72] Aydin, "Religious Pluralism," 345-346.
[73] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 115.
[74] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 144.
[75] For example, see Qurʾān 2:246-252, 5: 26, 7:136-141, 7:159-171, 5:26, 32:23, 45:16. See also Uri Rubin, "Children of Israel," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, 303.

the theological and historical backdrop of the communities referred to in the Qurʾān as Jews and Nazarenes.[76] These interconnections and overlaps are also made explicit in a number of references to Jesus' interaction and relationship to the Children of Israel. Jesus is depicted as being sent to the Children of Israel and as receiving various responses:

> *You who believe, be God's helpers. As Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, 'Who will come with me to help God?' The disciples said, 'We shall be God's helpers.' Some of the Children of Israel believed and some disbelieved: We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top.*[77]

Jesus' prophetic mission is also presented as a confirmation of the Torah (*al-Tawrāt*)—the scripture of the Children of Israel and the Jews—and the introduction of a new scripture, the Gospel (*al-ʾInjīl*):

> *We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed—a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God* (muttaqīn).[78]

Similarly, the label 'People of Scripture' (*ahl al-kitāb*) does not refer to only one group; it is a collective term for multiple groups that have received divine revelation prior to the advent of the Qurʾānic revelation. This inclusive character is manifest in Qurʾān 5:65-66, which—like the preceding mention of Jesus—urges the People of Scripture to uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and what God has "sent down to them:"

> *If only the People of the Scripture would believe and be mindful of God, We would take away their sins and bring them into the Gardens of Delight. If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have been given abundance from above and from below: some of them are on the right course, but many of them do evil.*[79]

---

[76] They also, in many ways, form the theological and historical backdrop of the Qurʾānic revelation itself.

[77] Qurʾān 61:14:
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونوا أَنصَارَ اللَّهِ كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنصَارُ اللَّهِ فَآمَنَت طَّائِفَةٌ مِّن بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرَت طَّائِفَةٌ فَأَيَّدْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَى عَدُوِّهِمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ

[78] Qurʾān 5:46: وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَى آثَارِهِم بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

[79] Qurʾān 5:65-66: وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُواْ وَاتَّقَوْاْ لَكَفَّرْنَا عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلأَدْخَلْنَاهُمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ
وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُواْ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالإِنجِيلَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيهِم مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ لأَكَلُواْ مِن فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِن تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِم مِّنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُّقْتَصِدَةٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنْهُمْ سَاء مَا يَعْمَلُونَ

The fact that the Torah and the Gospel are mentioned explicitly indicates that the collective designation People of the Scripture at least refers to the Children of Israel, the Jews, and the Nazarenes. Many have aimed to restrict the designation People of the Scripture to these groups alone,[80] but there have been vigorous debates over this restriction and, as Esack notes, in "none of the disciplines of exegesis, Islamic history or legal scholarship have Muslims known anything approximating consensus about the identity of the People of the Book."[81] The lack of consensus has resulted from unresolved questions related to the identity of the Sabians who appear to be included among the *ahl al-kitāb*; to Qurʾānic references to other scriptures besides the Torah and Gospel;[82] and to the possibility of other religions being included among *ahl al-kitāb*.[83]

Madigan's semantic analysis of the concept *kitāb* adds additional layers of complexity to the discussion of the referents of the label People of the Scripture. If, as he argues, *kitāb* does not represent a physical book, but rather a "process and symbol," then this has serious implications for understanding the collective label.[84] Madigan himself states that in light of his larger study the label *ahl al-kitāb* should be "understood as those who have been given not *possession of* but rather *access to* and *insight into* the knowledge, wisdom and sovereignty of God for which the very fluid term *kitāb* serves as a symbol."[85] If the criteria for inclusion in this group become access and insight, rather than a possession of a physical book, then the

[80] For example, M. Sharon, "People of the Book," McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4, 36. Sharon states that the People of the "Book" refers only to Jews and Christians, and that the Qurʾān holistically depicts this group as the "enemies" of the Muslim community.
[81] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 153.
[82] See Qurʾān 3:163, 4:162, 17:55, 20:133, 21:105, 26:196, 53:36, 80:13, 87:18-19.
[83] Yohanan Friedmann provides an overview of these debates as part of his analysis of the manner in which unbelievers have been classified in Islamic exegesis, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*. See Yohanan Friedmann, "Classification of Unbelievers," in *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 54-86. See also Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 153; François de Blois, "Sabians," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4, 511.
[84] Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image*, 194.
[85] Daniel Madigan, "Book," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, 242.

boundaries of the People of the Scripture most certainly expand. It is not the objective of this study to redefine those boundaries, but it is important to note that such questions do arise.

While debates over the identity of the People of the Scripture and other groups continue,[86] one thing that is known about all of these groups is that they are communities that are defined by their encounter with divine revelation. This is clear in the preceding *āyāt* that mention various scriptures and messengers of God in relation to the People of Scripture, Nazarenes, Jews, and the Children of Israel. In the case of the Sabians and the Magians, the connection with revelation is made indirectly due to the fact that they, along with others, are described as being subject to divine judgment:

> *As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the associators, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God witnesses all things.*[87]

Elsewhere, the Qurʾān indicates that no individual will be subject to judgment unless they have received warning in the form of revelation delivered through a messenger:

> *Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good; whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear another's burden, nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.*[88]

Thus, Sabians and Magians must have received revelation and messengers as well or else the people that comprise those communities would not be subject to judgment. The fact that Sabians and Magians have received revelation is also confirmed in a series of *āyāt* that depict revelation and messengers as universal phenomena. God has not deprived any community of revelation:

> *We have sent you [Prophet] with the Truth as a bearer of good news and warning—every community* (umma) *has been sent a warner.*[89]

---

[86] Although commonly believed to denote the Zoroastrians, there have been debates over the referent of the label Magians. (See William R. Darrow, "Magians," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 3, 244.)

[87] Qurʾān 22:27: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

[88] Qurʾān 17:15: مَّنِ اهْتَدَى فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَلاَ تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّى نَبْعَثَ رَسُولاً

> *We sent a messenger to every community* (umma)*, saying, 'Worship God and shun false gods.' Among them were some God guided; misguidance took hold of others. So travel through the earth and see what was the fate of those who denied the truth.*[90]
>
> *For every community* (umma) *there is a messenger, and when their messenger comes, they will be judged justly. They will not be wronged.*[91]

These *āyāt* not only proclaim the universal nature of revelation and messengers, but they also introduce the central concept of *umma* (community). As these *āyāt* make evident, God's communication is delivered to various *umam* (communities) in order to guide and warn the individuals of those *umam*. *Umam* are the communal recipients of God's revelation. Some of these *umam* and their messengers are mentioned explicitly by name—such as, the Sabians, Magians, Jews, Children of Israel, Nazarenes, and the People of the Scripture—while others are not:

> *We have sent other messengers before you—some We have mentioned to you and some We have not—and no messenger could bring about a sign except with God's permission. When [the Day] God ordained comes, just judgment will be passed between them: there and then, those who followed falsehood will be lost.*[92]

Even Muḥammad is described as being sent to an *umma:*[93]

> *So We have sent you [Prophet] to a community* (umma)*—other communities* (umam) *passed away long before them—to recite to them what We reveal to you. Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy. Say, 'He is my Lord: there is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him and to Him is my return."*[94]

---

[89] Qurʾān 35:24: إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ

[90] Qurʾān 16:36: وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولاً أَنِ اعْبُدُواْ اللّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُواْ الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ هَدَى اللّهُ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلالَةُ فَسِيرُواْ فِي الأَرْضِ فَانظُرُواْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ

[91] Qurʾān 10:47: وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَاء رَسُولُهُمْ قُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لاَ يُظْلَمُونَ

[92] Qurʾān 40:78: وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُم مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُم مَّن لَّمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا جَاء أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

[93] I will not focus on the complex and intriguing issues related to the jurisdiction or boundaries of Muḥammad's *umma* (i.e., the recipients of his message), but it is generally conceived of by Muslims as being universal and not restricted temporally or geographically.

[94] Qurʾān 13:30: كَذَلِكَ أَرْسَلْنَاكَ فِي أُمَّةٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهَا أُمَمٌ لِّتَتْلُوَ عَلَيْهِمُ الَّذِيَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ بِالرَّحْمَـنِ قُلْ هُوَ رَبِّي لا إِلَـهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ مَتَابِ

Moreover, the centrality of the concept of *umma* is confirmed in *āyāt* that—similar to the already mentioned Qurʾān 10:47—indicate that, on the Day of Judgment, messengers will be called as witnesses for their respective *umam*:

> *What will they do when We bring a witness from each community* (umma)*, with you [Muḥammad] as a witness against these people?*[95]
>
> *The day will come when We raise up a witness from every community* (*umma*)*, when the disbelievers will not be allowed to make excuses or amends.*[96]
>
> *The day will come when We raise up in each community* (umma) *a witness against them, and We shall bring you [Prophet] as a witness against these people, for We have sent the Scripture down to you explaining everything, and as guidance and mercy and good news to those who devote themselves to God.* [97]
>
> *We shall call a witness from every community* (umma)*, and say, 'Produce your evidence,' and then they will know that truth belongs to God alone; the gods they invented will forsake them.*[98]

When assembled, the preceding Qurʾānic *āyāt* indicate that in its most general form the term *umma* denotes a community that is sent revelation and messengers and then held accountable on the Day of Judgment. It is crucial to recognize that, although revelation is delivered to a community as a whole, and thus every member of that community will be subject to judgment, judgment will not be carried out on a group by group basis. It is only revelation and the resultant 'eligibility' for judgment that is assigned communally; judgment—on the basis of *taqwā*—is carried out individually, *nafs* (soul) by *nafs*, not *umma* by *umma*:

> *On the Day when every soul* (nafs) *finds all the good it has done present before it, it will wish all the bad it has done to be far, far away. God warns you to beware of Him, but God is compassionate towards His servants.*[99]
>
> *Beware* (ʾittaqū) *of a Day when you will be returned to God: every soul* (nafs) *will be paid in full for what it has earned, and no one will be wronged.*[100]

---

[95] Qurʾān 4:41: فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جِئْنَا مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ عَلَى هَـؤُلاء شَهِيدًا

[96] Qurʾān 16:84: وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا ثُمَّ لاَ يُؤْذَنُ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَلاَ هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ

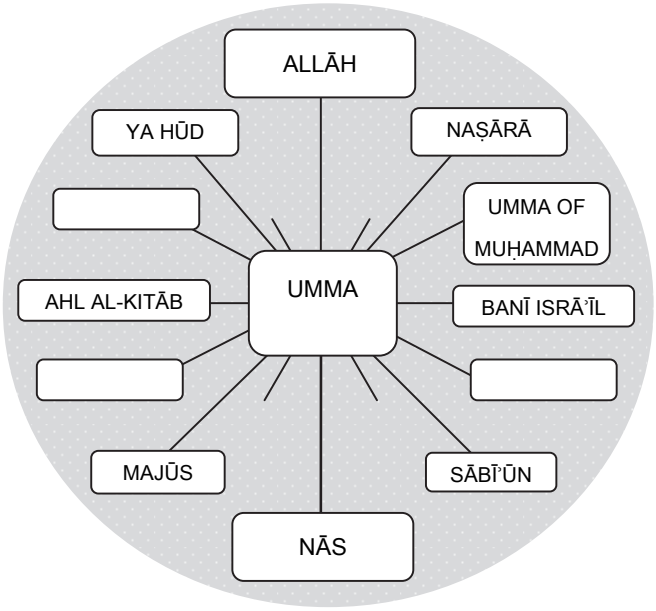
[97] Qurʾān 16:89: وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِم مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَى هَـؤُلاء وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

[98] Qurʾān 28:75: وَنَزَعْنَا مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا فَقُلْنَا هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ فَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ الْحَقَّ لِلَّهِ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ

[99] Qurʾān 3:30: يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِن سُوَءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ اللّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَاللّهُ رَؤُوفُ بِالْعِبَادِ

In light of the general meaning of *umma* and its connection with revelation and judgment, it is possible to envision the Sabians, Magians, Jews, Children of Israel, Nazarenes, People of the Scripture, the *umma* of Muḥammad, and the anonymous *umam* as various key-terms that reside in the semantic field surrounding the focus-word *umma* (Diagram 5). This is a semantic or conceptual relationship, not a relationship of exact symmetry. As already discussed, some of these terms may refer to specific discrete communities, others overlap, and others are collective terms. Moreover, some of these key-terms appear to be *ex post facto* labels for communities that have received revelation (that is, *ahl al-kitāb*), while others may be labels that were connected with the communities even prior to the advent of revelation.[101] Despite these differences, they are all conceptually woven together through their common association as *umam* of revelation and judgment.

Diagram 5



LATERAL RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE:
SEMANTIC FIELD OF *UMMA*

The connection between these groups and the concept of *umma* is not entirely novel. Frederick Denny, for example, has written extensively on the Qurʾānic meaning of *umma* and other "religio-communal" terms.[102] Denny acknowledges that *umma* generally refers to a

[100] Qurʾān 2:281: وَاتَّقُواْ يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللّهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لاَ يُظْلَمُونَ
[101] This would be the case with Nazarenes if, in fact, the label was based upon the geographical locale of Jesus.
[102] Frederick Mathewson Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," *History of Religions* 15, no. 1 (Aug. 1975): 34-70; Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Community and Society in the Qurʾān," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the*

"human community in a religious sense," that is, a human community that is associated with revelation, messengers and judgment.[103] Denny also perceptively connects the term *umma* with a variety of relevant themes, including oneness, messengers and revelation, the notion of an appointed term, judgment, religion, and *manāsik* (rites or practices). However, he ultimately argues, on the basis of the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology,[104] that the general meaning of *umma* is characteristic only of the earliest chronological stages of the Qurʾān's revelation. Thereafter, the term *umma* progressively develops, first into a specific reference to a community that is unified in beliefs and practices (*umma waḥida*) and then into the specific reference to the ideal unified community of Muḥammad (*umma muslima,* the *khayr umma*).[105] As the chronological culmination, this latter meaning of *umma*, according to Denny, becomes the primary meaning of the term within the Qurʾān; "[a]lthough nowhere does the Qurʾān explicitly state this, it is not inaccurate to assert that the Muslim *umma* is seen in Islam's scripture as the 'qurʾānic *umma.*'"[106] Denny's conclusion does represent the common, extra-Qurʾānic understanding of *umma* as a term that specifically designates the Muslim community, but it also detrimentally colors his examination of some crucial themes. This is evident, for example, in his limited treatment of the fact that God has in some way willed the "disunity of mankind."[107] If unity

---

Qurʾān, vol. 1, 367; Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qurʾān," *Numen* 24, no. 1 (Apr. 1977): 26-59; Frederick Mathewson Denny , "Umma," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* vol. 10, 859.

[103] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 34.

[104] The Nöldeke-Schwally chronology classifies Qurʾānic *āyāt* and chapters into four chronological time periods: three Meccan and one Madinan. This chronology, like other chronologies, is used as a basis to track changes in and development of Qurʾānic concepts and themes over time. (See Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans. Zweite Auflage*, bearbeitet von Friedrich Schwally. 3 vols. 1909–38.)

[105] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 64-65, 68-70. See Qurʾān 23:52, 5:48, 2:128, 3:110. I will discuss these *āyāt* in greater detail later in this chapter.

[106] Denny, "Community and Society in the Qurʾān," 367.

[107] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 49.

were the ideal, then why would God will disunity or difference? Denny attempts no explanation of this, but refers to it only as a "mystery" and as part of Qurʾānic ambiguity.[108]

In outlining the structure of his study, Denny states that he has purposely excluded the analysis of the more general connotation of the term *umma*. His rationale behind this exclusion is noteworthy; according to Denny, such analysis "would not add to our understanding, because all of the examples would fall under the same heading."[109] What Denny has here dismissed as insignificant is what I contend is most significant about the Qurʾānic concept of *umma*. It is precisely the general and comprehensive connotation of *umma* that defines it as the focus-word of the semantic field of lateral religious difference. I will therefore focus on the general Qurʾānic meaning of *umma* as a human community that is associated with revelation, messengers and judgment. I will, however, in the next section reexamine some of Denny's contentions about reification as expressed in non-general usages of *umma*, such as *umma waḥida* and *umma muslima*.

As has already been established, God sends revelation and messengers to different *umam*. This is a universal fact although only some communities are mentioned specifically in the Qurʾān. The connection between the *umam* and revelation raises a number of important questions related to divine intention and will (that is, the second defining characteristic of lateral difference). Where do *umma* come from? Are they the products of revelation or the targets of revelation? If the targets—as they appear to be—then how did they come into existence? Are they the result of human degeneration? Or are they the result of something else? Also, what is the intended outcome of the revelation sent to various *umam*? Should they

[108] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 49-50.
[109] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 44.

all become one *umma* united without any differentiation, as Denny contends? Or has God willed certain particularities in each *umma*?

To begin, it is evident that revelation does not create the various *umam*. Revelation is sent via a messenger to a community that already exists:

> *We have sent you [Prophet] with the Truth as a bearer of good news and warning—every community* (umma) *has been sent a warner.*[110]

Thus *umma* should not be considered as religious communities in the sense of a community that arises from a particular experience of revelation. The communities will be affected and possibly changed by revelation, but they are not called into existence through revelation.

From where then do these different communities emerge? What is their origin? As discussed by Muslim women interpreters, the Qurʾān describes God's creation of humankind as the initial creation of a singular *nafs* that was later, and intentionally, differentiated.[111] While Muslim women interpreters highlight intentional differentiation into the male and female biological sexes, the Qurʾān is equally explicit about intentional linguistic, racial and ethnic differentiation of the original creation:

> *One of His signs is that He created you from dust and—lo and behold!—you became human and scattered far and wide. Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect. Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. There truly are signs in this for those who know.*[112]

> *Have you not considered how God sends water down from the sky and that We produce with it fruits of varied colors; that there are in the mountains layers of white and red of*

---

[110] Qurʾān 35:24: إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ

[111] They cite Qurʾān 4:1: "People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from the same essence created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship: God is always watching over you."
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالاً كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاء وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءلُونَ بِهِ وَالأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

[112] Qurʾān 30:20-22: وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَنتُم بَشَرٌ تَنتَشِرُونَ
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُم مَّوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالِمِينَ

> *various hues and jet black; that there are various colors among human beings, wild animals, and livestock too? It is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of God. God is almighty, most forgiving.*[113]

The various human "languages" and "colors" that God has created and scattered throughout the world are described as *āyāt* of God. As emphasized in the preceding discussion of *taqwā*, *āyāt* are those things which God intentionally creates in order to prompt human reflection on God's existence, majesty and power. The communal aspect of this intentional diversification of humanity is made even more explicit in a familiar *āya*:

> *People, we created you all from a male and a female and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him* (ʾatqākum)*: God is all knowing, all aware.*[114]

This *āya* is the same one which Barlas and others invoke in order to argue that *taqwā* is the sole basis of evaluation. God intentionally creates communal diversity in the form of races and tribes, but individuals are not assessed based on that type of difference. They are only assessed in reference to *taqwā*. This *āya* also confirms another aspect of lateral difference. The intentional communal differences are created for a purpose: "so that you should recognize one another." While I will examine the meaning of this phrase in greater detail in Chapter Nine, at this point, it is enough to acknowledge that there is a purpose behind the difference. The existence of a purpose confirms the divine intentionality of this communal diversification, and it also introduces the fact that such differences are not supposed to be homogenized or eradicated.

If communal difference arises—at least in part—from creation, as willed by God, what is the goal of the revelation that is sent to these communities?[115] In other words, what type of

---

[113] Qurʾān 35:27-28: أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاء فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاء إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

[114] Qurʾān 49:13: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

change does revelation come to effect within these communities? The simple answer is that all revelation and messengers share a common goal of teaching people about God, guiding them to correct practice, and warning them of individual accountability and the Day of Judgment. It is, though, worth reflecting back again on the preceding section to recall that revelation and messengers are only some of the vehicles by which God intends to carry out this mission; the *fiṭra* and natural *āyāt* are also created in order to facilitate these insights.

Strikingly, while Qurʾānic references to *umma* clearly indicate this overarching mission of teaching, guiding and warning, they simultaneously indicate that every *umma* has deliberately been appointed specific rites and acts of devotion (*manāsik*) by God:

> *We have appointed acts of devotion* (mansak) *for every community* (umma) *to observe, so do not let them argue with you [Prophet] about this matter. Call them to your Lord—you are on the right path—and if they argue with you, say, 'God is well aware of what you are doing.'*[116]

> *We appointed acts of devotion* (mansak) *for every community* (umma), *for them to celebrate God's name over the livestock He provided for them: your God is One, so devote yourselves to Him. [Prophet], give good news to the humble whose hearts fill with awe whenever God is mentioned, who endure whatever happens to them with patience, who keep up the prayer, who give to others out of Our provision to them.*[117]

Connecting *manāsik* closely with the rituals of the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), Denny contends that the term does not refer to daily or routine religious practices but to more specialized or intensive rituals, rituals that comprise only a small part of any religion including Islam.[118] In doing so, he

---

[115] I am deliberately simplifying this discussion, but I am not implying that God creates communities that are statically bound and unchanging, and then those communities are the exact ones to which revelation is sent. What I am suggesting is that these are two things we know for sure: creation of communal difference and revelation sent to communities. There are a vast number of intervening processes, including group interaction, the formation of new communities, and the disappearance of other communities. However, at some juncture, there is a necessary convergence between God's willing communal diversification in creation and God sending revelation to communities.

[116] Qurʾān 22:67: لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعُنَّكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَادْعُ إِلَى رَبِّكَ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَى هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

[117] Qurʾān 22:34-35: وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَى مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّن بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ فَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَهُمْ وَالْمُقِيمِي الصَّلَاةِ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

[118] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 64.

downplays the significance of this form of divinely-intended difference. However, Qurʾān 5:48 reiterates the idea that God has willed ummatic particularities through revelation:

> *... We have assigned a law* (shirʿa) *and a path* (minhāj) *to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community* (umma waḥida)*, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.*[119]

Unlike *manāsik*, the terms *shirʿa* and *minhāj* are not as easy to confine or relegate. While there is only one other Qurʾānic reference to *sharīʿa* (also meaning an ordained way or law) and no other references to *minhāj*,[120] the specific law associated with the Muslim community is generally held to be the only acceptable *shirʿa*; it is seen as abrogating and superseding all others. However, this *āya* states that God has intentionally given diverse laws and paths. It also indicates that despite God's ability to do otherwise, God did not create an *umma waḥida* (a single community).[121] Therefore, God not only appoints particularities, but God also deliberately withholds uniformity.

Moreover, this *āya* indicates a purpose in God's diversification through revelation: "to test you ... so race to do good." Along with the purpose of diversification through creation, I will explore the potential meanings of this purpose in Chapter Nine, but again its existence alone confirms the divine intention behind these differences. For that reason, it raises a whole host of difficult questions about how different communities of revelation should understand those differences. As noted, the general perception of this within the Islamic tradition is that other ways were appointed in the past, but that now those ways have been superseded. Supersession is in many ways a shortcut out of the maze of complexities that are raised by the

---

[119] Qurʾān 5:48 (excerpt):
... لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى الله مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[120] Qurʾān 45:18: "Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a clear religious path, so follow it. Do not follow the desires of those who lack knowledge."
ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَى شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاء الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

[121] I will discuss this phrase in greater detail in the next section.

clear depiction of *umam*—in both their origins in creation and in their relationship to revelation—as communities that are intentionally and therefore purposefully differentiated.

The final defining characteristic of lateral difference is that it does not serve as the basis of evaluation. As explained in the beginning of this chapter, this does not mean that lateral groups are completely free of evaluation; rather, it means that evaluation will always be partial and differentiated. If there is evaluation of lateral groups, a single evaluation will not be uniformly ascribed to an entire group solely on the basis of membership in that group. Therefore in attempting to demonstrate that the Sabians, Magians, Jews, Children of Israel, Nazarenes, People of the Scripture, the *umma* of Muḥammad, and the anonymous *umam* are lateral religious groups, it is only necessary to show that they are partially and diversely evaluated, not that they are never evaluated.

Partial evaluation is reasonably easy to discover within the Qurʾānic text; many *āyāt* distinguish a portion or section within a particular *umma*:

> *Some Jews distort words from their contexts: they say, 'We hear and disobey,' and 'Listen,' [adding the insult] 'May you not hear,' and 'Raʿina [Look after us],' twisting it abusively with their tongues [to make it sound like 'you fool' or 'you evil one'] so as to disparage religion. If they had said, 'We hear and obey,' 'Listen,' and 'Unzurna[Look towards us],' that would have been better and more proper for them. But God has spurned them for their defiance; they believe very little.*[122]

> *Some of the People of the Scripture would dearly love to lead you astray, but they only lead themselves astray, though they do not realize it.*[123]

In their partial evaluation, these *āyāt* clearly demonstrate that the behaviors of distorting the meaning of revelation and leading astray are not ascribed to these *umam* in their entirety. It is only "some of" the individuals within these *umam* that engage in such actions. By inference,

---

[122] Qurʾān 4:46:
مِّنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُواْ يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَاسْمَعْ غَيْرَ مُسْمَعٍ وَرَاعِنَا لَيًّا بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ وَطَعْنًا فِي الدِّينِ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ قَالُواْ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا وَاسْمَعْ وَانظُرْنَا لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَأَقْوَمَ وَلَكِن لَّعَنَهُمُ اللّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً
See also Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qurʾānic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 371-372.

[123] Qurʾān 3:69:
وَدَّت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يُضِلُّونَكُمْ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلاَّ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

this means that there are some within those *umam* that uphold the meaning of revelation and that do not lead others astray. Qurʾān 3:75-76, however, does not require any inference as it describes two different types of behavior among the People of the Scripture:

> *There are People of the Scripture who, if you [Prophet] entrust them with a heap of gold, will return it to you intact, but there are others of them who, if you entrust them with a single dinar, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over them, because they say, 'We are under no obligation towards the gentiles.' They tell a lie against God and they know it. No indeed! God loves those who keep their pledges and are mindful of Him* (muttaqīn)*.*[124]

It is critical to underscore the basis upon which the preceding evaluations are lodged. The evaluations are not an assessment of the particularities of the *umam*; rather, they are assessments of qualities and actions that have a negative or positive relationship with *taqwā*. In other words, they are not criticized because they are Jews or People of the Scripture; they are criticized because *taqwā* demands recognition and consciousness of God, as well as social interactions that align with and encourage such consciousness. Qurʾān 3:75-76 confirms this, when after distinguishing between the two types of people, it connects the keeping of pledges with being *muttaqūn*.

The fact that it is *taqwā* determining these assessments is made even clearer in *āyāt* that juxtapose the various lateral religious communities with the hierarchical religious concepts:

> *Some of the People of the Scripture believe* (yuʾminu) *in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price. These people will have their reward with their Lord: God is swift in reckoning.*[125]

[124] Qurʾān 3:75-76:
وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِدِينَارٍ لاَّ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلاَّ مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَآئِمًا ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُواْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ
بَلَى مَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَى فَإِنَّ اللّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ

[125] Qurʾān 3:199:
وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَن يُؤْمِنُ بِاللهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلّهِ لاَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلاً أُوْلَـئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

> *Those who disbelieve* (kafarū) *among the People of the Scripture and the associators were not about to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence.*[126]
>
> *Those who disbelieve* (kafarū) *among the People of the Scripture and the associators will have the Fire of Hell, there to remain. They are the worst of creation.*[127]

Here, *īmān* and *kufr* (two of the key-terms in the semantic field of *taqwā*) are ascribed to portions of the People of the Scripture (a key-term in the semantic field of *umma*). As was mentioned in Chapter Two, many exegetes have attempted to evade the apparent meaning of *āyāt* such as 3:199, which praise other communities outside of the Muslim community. They have attempted to argue that such *āyāt* refer to minimal or highly specific contingents of those *umam*, or that they refer to People of the Scripture who actually converted to Islam, that is, joined the Muslim community.[128] Furthermore, other scholars have appealed to the theory of *naskh* (abrogation) and stated that these *āyāt* have been replaced by other—less affirmative—*āyāt*.

There has been a similar amount of effort put into arguing that negative, yet partial, depictions (such as Qurʾān 98:1 and 98:6) should be extended to include entire groups. Both the endeavors to circumscribe and to extend the explicit meaning of these *āyāt* result from the failure to distinguish between lateral and hierarchical religious difference. When the two are conflated or treated as being synonymous—as with Ibn Kathīr, Izutsu and Denny—then intricate exegetical efforts must be made to demonstrate that every positive evaluation is associated with the Muslim community, and every negative evaluation is associated with other *umam*.

---

[126] Qurʾān 98:1: لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

[127] Qurʾān 98:6: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُوْلَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ

[128] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation & Pluralism*, 161-164. See also McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*; Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and Other Religions," 299.

Still, there are *āyāt* that appear to make more inclusive and intrinsic evaluations of groups. For example, Qurʾān 9:30-31 describes the Jews and Nazarenes, without explicit qualification, as engaged in some form of associationism or *shirk*:

> *The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Nazarenes said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led! They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners!*[129]

Based on the *āyāt* that unambiguously state the evaluations are not all-inclusive, and on the differentiation between lateral and hierarchical religious difference, it is not possible to interpret the critiques in this *āya* as applying to all. Nor is it possible to say that, from the Qurʾānic perspective, there is an automatic or ubiquitous connection between *shirk* and the communities of the Jews and the Nazarenes. Again, to do so would be to conflate lateral and hierarchical religious difference. Furthermore, this is not only the case with *āyāt* that negatively depict other *umam*; it is also the case with favorable depictions:

> *The believers, the Jews, the Nazarenes, and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[130]

Commonly invoked as a blanket affirmation of other communities outside of the *umma* of Muḥammad (the Muslim community), this *āya* cannot be read as such for the same reasons that *shirk* cannot be inclusively or inherently tied to all Jews or all Nazarenes. This *āya* is not an affirmation of lateral communities; lateral communities do not need to be affirmed or critiqued. They are divinely-willed and non-evaluative entities. This *āya*, rather, is an affirmation of *taqwā* and *īmān*. If people within those communities—and apparently within any

---

[129] Qurʾān 9:30-31: وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عُزَيْرٌ ابْنُ اللهِ وَقَالَتْ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُم بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهِؤُونَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَبْلُ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ اتَّخَذُواْ أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُواْ إِلاَّ لِيَعْبُدُواْ إِلَـهًا وَاحِدًا لاَّ إِلَـهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

[130] Qurʾān 2:62: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَالَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحاً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

community—manifest *taqwā*, they will be rewarded. If they do not, they will not. This *āya* does not imply that those communities in their entirety manifest *taqwā* any more than the preceding *āya* implies that all Jews and Nazarenes in their entirety engage in *shirk*. Some do, others do not.

While it is specifically stated as not being the case in reference to the Jews, the Nazarenes and the People of the Scripture, there always exists the possibility that an entire lateral *umma* could be characterized by a specific hierarchal manifestation of *taqwā*. For example, an entire *umma* might manifest *īmān* or manifest *kufr*. Improbable as this may be, even in such a situation the assessment would still be based upon *taqwā* and would still be carried out on an individual level. One illustration of this is found in Qurʾānic accounts of previous *umam* that received messengers but did not heed their guidance. The Qurʾān occasionally describes their lack of *taqwā* and punishment in communal terms:

> *How many towns We have destroyed! Our punishment came to them by night or while they slept in the afternoon.*[131]

However, the Qurʾānic account of Hud, for example, clarifies that judgment is always based on *taqwā* and carried out on the individual level. Not everyone was destroyed, and the ones who were destroyed were those who denied and did not believe, that is, those who did not manifest *taqwā*:

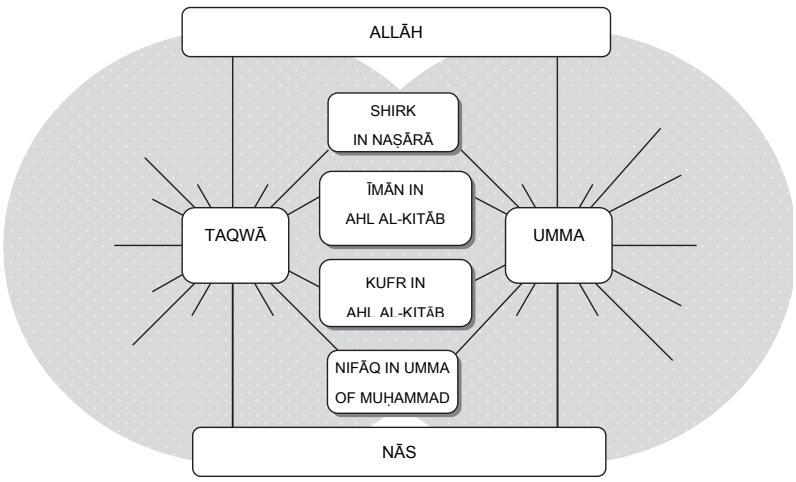
> *We saved him, and those who were with him, through Our mercy; We destroyed those who denied Our revelations and would not believe.*[132]

[131] Qurʾān 7:4: وَكَم مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا فَجَاءهَا بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا أَوْ هُمْ قَآئِلُونَ

[132] Qurʾān 7:72: فَأَنجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَقَطَعْنَا دَابِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِآيَاتِنَا وَمَا كَانُواْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

The key to understanding Qur'ānic evaluations is to understand them as intersections of the semantic fields of lateral and hierarchical religious difference (Diagram 6). The two fields intersect, thereby producing evaluations, but the intersections are dynamic and multiple. In other words, the fields do not merge and so lose their unique characteristics. Nor do they intersect once and for all. They dynamically intersect in a number of possible ways and in an ongoing fashion. This is why, for instance, there are various assessments of the People of the Scripture. It is not an inconsistency to be argued away through specification or *naskh*. It is rather the result of the fact that the semantic field of *taqwā* and the semantic field of *umma* are distinct yet related.

Diagram 6



INTERSECTIONS OF HIERARCHICAL AND LATERAL RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

5. Umma *and Reification?*

While my primary focus is the general usage of *umma*, by way of concluding this chapter, I will explore some unique occurrences of the term *umma* that Denny presents as indicating progressive reification. He maintains that the term denotes a singular religious community and then ultimately the specific Muslim community.[133] In these occurrences, the word *umma* itself is modified, resulting in designations such as *umma qā'ima* (an upright group),

[133] It is important to note that many of the divergences between Denny's interpretation and my own result from the fact that he adopts a chronological methodology, something which I have deliberately not employed in this study.

umma muqtaṣida (a group on the right course), *umma muslima* (a group that submits to God), and *umma waḥida* (one community).

The first two designations, *umma qāʾima* and *umma muqtaṣida*, describe portions of the People of the Scripture:

> *But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Scripture who are upright* (umma qāʾima)*, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, who believe in God and the Last Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous and they will not be denied [the reward] for whatever good deeds they do: God knows exactly who is conscious of Him* (muttaqīn)*.*[134]

> *If only the People of the Scripture would believe and be mindful of God* (ʾittaqū)*, We would take away their sins and bring them into the Gardens of Delight. If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have been given abundance from above and from below: some of them are on the right course* (umma muqtaṣida)*, but many of them do evil.*[135]

While the fact that the word *umma* here is uniquely used here to describe a group within a lateral *umma*, the resulting meaning is no different than the previously discussed partial evaluations. These two designations describe some of the People of the Scripture who are upright and on the right course in the same manner that other *āyāt* described some of the People of the Scripture as believing. While the usage of the word *umma* is unique, the connotation is not. Denny admits that *umma qāʾima*, while it does have some "religious" meaning, does not mean a specific religion.[136] He describes it as "the portion of an *ummah* which is actually living up to its calling."[137] This description aligns with what I have already stated, that it is a *taqwā*-related evaluation of a portion of a lateral *umma*. Strangely, after acknowledging this, Denny nevertheless proceeds to contend that the "term applies ideally to

---

[134] Qurʾān 3:113-115:
لَيْسُواْ سَوَاء مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَآئِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللّهِ آنَاء اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُوْلَـئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

[135] Qurʾān 5:65-66:
وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُواْ وَاتَّقَوْاْ لَكَفَّرْنَا عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلأدْخَلْنَاهُمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ
وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُواْ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالإِنجِيلَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيهِم مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ لأكَلُواْ مِن فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِن تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِم مِّنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُّقْتَصِدَةٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنْهُمْ سَاء مَا يَعْمَلُونَ

[136] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 64.

[137] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 65.

the Muslims."[138] He does not explain how he arrives at this conclusion. In relation to the designation *umma muqtaṣida*, Denny describes Qurʾān 5:66 as "perplexing" and ponders whether this designation refers to Jews or Christians who had become Muslims.[139] What perplexes him is not whether it refers to Muslims in the lateral sense; rather, he struggles to determine from which group the converts came. Since Denny equates the Qurʾānic ideal of *umma* with the Muslim community, he does not read the *āya* for its apparent meaning, that is, that some of the People of the Scripture are on the right course. Rather, he reads it as referring to a group of people who joined the reified Muslim community.

The designation *umma muslima* appears in the context of a prayer made by Abraham and Ishmael:

> *Our Lord, make us devoted to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You* (umma muslima)*. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.*[140]

Denny interprets this *āya* as depicting Abraham praying for a particular and novel type of lateral community, a community distinct from the Jews and the Nazarenes. In other words, Denny contends that the prayer of Abraham is a prayer for the emergence of the reified Muslim community.[141] Denny seems to overlook the straightforward meaning of the designation *umma muslima*. Abraham is praying for his descendants to submit and be devoted to God, that is, to manifest *taqwā* through *islām*. Abraham is not praying for the emergence of a particular lateral community, the Muslim community. It may be true that other lateral *umam* have failed as a whole to live up to this prayer, and it may even be true that Abraham is praying for a lateral community to do so in their entirety. However, the mere occurrence of

[138] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 65.
[139] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 66.
[140] Qurʾān 2:128: رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَآ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ
[141] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 68-69.

the Arabic word *muslim* does not automatically substantiate his claim that this is a unique and exclusive allusion to the Muslim community. According to the Qurʾān, every individual in every community has been commanded by God to manifest *taqwā*, and part of *taqwā* is *islām*.

Denny attempts to substantiate his contention about the reified and exclusive nature of *umma muslima* by citing Qurʾān 3:110, which seems to describe the lateral Muslim *umma* as *khayr umma* (the best community):[142]

> *You are the best community* (khayr umma) *singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If the People of the Scripture had also believed, it would have been better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers.*[143]

Denny's explanation of the characteristics of an *umma* considered to be the best *umma* is unquestionable; the best *umma*, according to the Qurʾān, would be one that orders what is right, forbids what is wrong and believes. In others words, the best *umma* would be one in which all its members manifested *taqwā*. However, Denny interprets this *āya* as stating that the *taqwā*-related evaluation of being "the best" is inherently ascribed to the lateral Muslim *umma* as a whole. This is an unacceptable conclusion in light of what has been argued throughout this chapter. While it is possible that all members of the lateral Muslim *umma* could manifest *taqwā* and thus be the *khayr umma*, it would never be automatically ascribed. Therefore, although the language of the *āya* states "you are the best community," this designation must be contextualized in order to garner a better appreciation of its meaning.

[142] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 69.
[143] Qurʾān 3:110:
كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُم مِّنْهُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

Situated in the context of a critique of some of the People of the Scripture who split into factions, fell into disputes, and did not believe,[144] Qurʾān 3:110 is preceded by 3:104-105, which issues an exhortation to *be* a community that does the same things as the *khayr umma*:

> *Be a community* (umma) *that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones. Do not be like those who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes: a terrible punishment awaits such people.*[145]

If the Muslim *umma* is automatically ascribed the status of *khayr umma*—as Denny's theory of reification advocates—then what is the purpose of this exhortation? Additionally, Qurʾān 3:113-115 distinguishes between individuals within the People of the Scripture. This is significant in and of its self, but in relation to Qurʾān 3:110, it is significant due to the way in which some of the People of Scripture are described:

> *But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Scripture who are an upright community* (umma qāʾima)*, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, who believe in God and the Last Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous and they will not be denied [the reward] for whatever good deeds they do: God knows exactly who is conscious of Him* (muttaqīn)*.*[146]

This *umma qāʾima* is described in exactly the same way as the *khayr umma*; they—among other things—believe, order what is right, and forbid what is wrong. Moreover, like all the *muttaqūn*, irrespective of their lateral *umma* affiliation, they will be rewarded. When Qurʾān 3:110 is placed in its context, what initially appears as an automatic ascription must be reinterpreted as a contingent assessment: if you do these things, if all of you do these things, then you are the *khayr umma*. The original Arabic does not contain the "if" or "then," but the context of the *āya* and the overarching Qurʾānic perspective on *taqwā* demand it.

---

[144] See Qurʾān 3:100-115.

[145] Qurʾān 3:104-105:

وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ
وَلاَ تَكُونُواْ كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُواْ وَاخْتَلَفُواْ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُوْلَـئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

[146] Qurʾān 3:113-115:

لَيْسُواْ سَوَاء مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَآئِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللّهِ آنَاء اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُوْلَـئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

The final distinctive usage of *umma* that I will explore is the phrase *umma waḥida* (one community). As already mentioned, Denny struggles with the idea that God wills disunity, that is, that God has not made humans into an *umma waḥida*. He acknowledges the *āyāt* that state this, but he nevertheless argues that *umma waḥida* is a midpoint in the progress of chronological reification, which describes the intended "single religious community of the People of the Book."[147] He bases this on Qurʾān 23:52-54 and Qurʾān 21:92-94:

> *This community of yours is one single community* (umma waḥida) *and I am your Lord, so serve Me. They have torn their unity apart, but they will all return to Us.*[148]

> *This community of yours is one* (umma waḥida)*—and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me* (ʾattaqūn)*—but they have split their affair into factions, each rejoicing in their own.*[149]

Denny argues that these *āyāt* state that the People of the Scripture are supposed to be an *umma waḥida*, but that "they" divide themselves into factions. However, Denny's presentation of these *āyāt* is not straightforward. The *umma waḥida* referred to in these *āyāt* is not an *umma waḥida* of the People of the Scripture. As Denny acknowledges (markedly without any resultant modification to his theory of reification), the Qurʾān is explicit that this has not been willed:

> *... We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community* (umma waḥida)*, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.*[150]

> *If God so willed, He would have made you all one people* (umma waḥida)*, but He leaves to stray whoever He will and guides whoever He will. You will be questioned about your deeds.*[151]

---

[147] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 48.

[148] Qurʾān 21:92-93:
إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ
وَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ كُلٌّ إِلَيْنَا رَاجِعُونَ

[149] Qurʾān 23:51-53:
يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ
وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ
فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

[150] Qurʾān 5:48 (excerpt):
... لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[151] Qurʾān 16:93:
وَلَوْ شَاء اللهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِن يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاء وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء وَلَتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

> *If God had so pleased, He could have made them a single community* (umma waḥida)*, but He admits to His mercy whoever He will; the evildoers will have no one to protect or help them.*[152]
>
> *If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community* (umma waḥida)*, but they continue to have their differences—except those on whom your Lord has mercy—for He created them to be this way, and the word of your Lord is final: 'I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men.'*[153]

Whatever this *umma waḥida* is, it is not something for humankind in general or lateral *umam*. In fact, this is also clear in the very verses cited by Denny to make this claim. Denny conveniently commences his quotation of these *āyāt* without acknowledging their explicit addressees. Both of the *āyāt* that say "this community of yours is an *umma waḥida*" are specifically addressed to the collective of God's messengers.[154] In *Sūrat al-ʾanbiyāʾ*, the "immediate context" is not just the story of the Virgin birth, but rather the forty-four *āyāt* that precede those cited by Denny recount the missions and trials of messengers, including Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Lot, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Ishmael, and Jonah. These messengers were all sent by God with the same mission—to teach about *taqwā*, to guide people to it, and to warn them—and they were all met with accusations of falsehood and people who refused their mission. The *āyāt* from *Sūrat al-muʾminūn* are situated similarly in a discussion of Noah's and Moses' missions. Yet, in this case, it is only necessary to cite the preceding *āya* to clarify the intended addressees:

> *Messengers, eat good things and do good deeds: I am well aware of what you do. This community of yours is one* (umma waḥida)*—and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me—but they have split their unity into factions, each rejoicing in their own.*[155]

---

[152] Qurʾān 42:8: وَلَوْ شَاء اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَهُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِن يُدْخِلُ مَن يَشَاء فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَالظَّالِمُونَ مَا لَهُم مِّن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

[153] Qurʾān 11:118-119: وَلَوْ شَاء رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلاَ يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ
إِلاَّ مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لأَمْلأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

[154] Intriguingly, Denny overlooks this in "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," but acknowledges it elsewhere. (See Denny, "Umma," 859.) His acknowledgment of the fact, however, does not change is interpretation of it as a stage in the process of reification.

[155] Qurʾān 23:51-53: يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ
وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

Therefore, these *āyāt*, which Denny presents as being indicative of progressive reification, do not refer to a particular lateral *umma*. They refer to the messengers sent by God to various *umam*. God's messengers form an *umma waḥida*. Recognizing that it is messengers that are designated as an *umma waḥida* and recognizing that God has deliberately not made humankind in general into an *umma waḥida*, raises an important question: what does *umma waḥida* signify? In other words, what is it that messengers as a collective share that God intentionally denies humankind? Are messengers a reified religious community, as Denny understands the phrase? His interpretation of it as such prevents him not only from acknowledging that the phrase refers to messengers—not People of the Scripture as a single lateral *umma*—but also from seeing another important and integrated possibility.

In addition to those already cited, there are three other Qurʾānic references to *umma waḥida*: Qurʾān 2:113, 10:19, and 43:33. The first two state that humankind in general—*al-nās*—was originally an *umma waḥida* but then differed:

> *Humankind* (nās) *was a single community* (umma waḥida)*, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path.*[156]

> *Humankind* (nās) *was originally one single community* (umma waḥida)*, but later they differed. If it had not been for a word from your Lord, judgment would already have been passed between them regarding their differences.*[157]

There are three aspects of these *āyāt* that are significant. First, *al-nās* was once an *umma waḥida*. Second, the differences—the divergences from that state of being an *umma waḥida*—are caused by people and so are considered blameworthy (that is, subject to evaluation and

---

فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

[156] Qurʾān 2:213:
كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِيمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لِمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

[157] Qurʾān 10:19:
وَمَا كَانَ النَّاسُ إِلاَّ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَاخْتَلَفُواْ وَلَوْلاَ كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ فِيمَا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

judgment). This same sentiment is also expressed in the already quoted Qurʾān 16:93, 42:8, 11:118-119, which also tie differences to the themes of guidance, straying, mercy and judgment. Third, the differences are considered resolvable through revelation and messengers. What kind of unity did *al-nās* have originally that they are negatively evaluated for losing, and for which they are sent revelation and messengers to regain?

As I have argued throughout the entirety of this chapter, lateral religious difference is not the basis of evaluation or judgment; only hierarchical religious difference is the basis of evaluation. If humans are being evaluated in these *āyāt*—which they are—then it must be due to hierarchical differences in terms of *taqwā*. This is supported by the fact that it is only the differences in *taqwā* that humans cause. As discussed, the Qurʾān understands that God intends lateral religious differences both through the creation of nations and tribes (Qurʾān 30:20-22, 35:27-28, and 49:13) and through the various rites, laws, and ways that God ordains through revelation (Qurʾān 5:48 and 22:34-35, and 22:67).

Moreover, the fact that God ordains diverse rites, laws, and ways through revelation means that the unity that revelation and messengers are sent to restore cannot possibly be uniformity that negates lateral religious difference. Revelation and messengers are one of the intentional means by which God creates such difference. Therefore, the type of unity that people have lost and messengers are sent to restore is unity of *taqwā*, hierarchically-evaluated religious unity. Going back to the first aspect of these *āyāt*, can it be said that humankind originally had a unity in terms of *taqwā*? Is there a form of unity that God created in all of humankind? It seems obvious that this unity of *taqwā*—the *umma waḥida* that humankind was—

refers to the universal *fiṭra* of all humankind, that *fiṭra* that God forms and inspires to know the distinction between "rebellion and *taqwā*."[158]

In light of this interpretation, *āyāt* that state that God could have made humankind into an *umma waḥida* but has deliberately refrained from doing so (Qurʾān 5:48, 16:93, 42:8, 11:118-119) become less ambiguous than Denny acknowledges.[159] God does not compel individuals to manifest *taqwā*; God does not compel unity of hierarchical difference. Rather, God provides various guides (in *fiṭra*, natural *āyāt*, revelation, and messengers), and individuals are held accountable for freely and persistently choosing to follow those guides.

The *āyāt* that describe messengers as an *umma waḥida* (Qurʾān 23:52-54 and 21:92-94) are also consistent with and better explicated by the interpretation of *umma waḥida* as a unity of *taqwā*. As established, messengers are not a unity in terms of the various rites, laws, and ways that they bring to their people. They are, however, united—perhaps even somewhat compelled—in their consciousness of God.[160] They all manifest *taqwā* and carry out their prophetic missions.

Moreover, the interpretation of *umma waḥida* as referring to a unity of *taqwā* not a unity of lateral communal difference is evident in the last Qurʾānic occurrence of the designation:

> *If it were not that all mankind might have become a single group* (umma waḥida) *We could have given all those who disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy houses with roofs of silver, sweeping staircases to ascend.*[161]

This *āya* states that God would have given disbelievers an abundance of worldly goods but did not because it would have resulted in all human beings becoming an *umma waḥida* of disbelievers, that is, becoming unified in their lack of *taqwā*.

---

[158] Qurʾān 91:7-8: وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

[159] Denny, "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān," 49-50.

[160] Compelled in that God strengthens them and gives them no choice in carrying out their missions. This is evident, for example, in the Qurʾānic account of Moses (e.g., Qurʾān 20:24-26).

[161] Qurʾān 43:33: وَلَوْلَا أَن يَكُونَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً لَجَعَلْنَا لِمَن يَكْفُرُ بِالرَّحْمَٰنِ لِبُيُوتِهِمْ سُقُفًا مِّن فَضَّةٍ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيْهَا يَظْهَرُونَ

Based on the foregoing analysis of these unique occurrences of *umma* within the Qurʾān, there is little indication that they depict progressive reification towards an ideal, unified, and singular lateral community. These occurrences are better accounted for in light of the distinction between hierarchical and lateral religious difference.

6. Conclusion

In Chapter Six, in the context of critiquing Izutsu's comparison of the Qurʾānic and Khārijite worldviews, I raised the question of whether it was possible for *īmān* to lose its "denotative stability and fixedness" in the same manner in which *kufr* had lost its denotative stability within the Khārijite worldview.[162] In the Khārijite worldview, *kufr* was no longer something kept at bay outside of the wall of the Muslim community; rather, it had "become something mobile" and freely roaming within the wall.[163] Based upon the distinction between lateral and hierarchical religious difference that I have tried to illuminate in this chapter, it is now possible to answer this question.

All of the concepts that inhabit the semantic field of *taqwā*—*kufr* and *īmān* included—are uniquely defined by their lack of denotative stability. They do not denote or correspond exactly and statically with specific lateral communities. These hierarchical concepts are mobile and able to roam within, outside, and across the boundaries of lateral *umam*. As such, they are precisely the type of difference—or otherness—described by J. Z. Smith; they are a form of difference that is always relational, dynamic, and provocative.[164]

This lack of denotative stability in reference to lateral communities, however, should not be misconstrued as indicating that *taqwā* and its related concepts lack definite content. As

[162] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52.
[163] Izutsu, *God and Man*, 52.
[164] Smith, *Relating Religion*, 242.

shown, hierarchical concepts are specific, evaluative and social; certain actions, behaviors, and beliefs in relation to God and other humans are positively evaluated and others are negatively evaluated. In fact, it is precisely by distinguishing between the two distinct, yet dynamically-intersecting semantic fields that it is possible to navigate between two objectionable extremes, that is, exclusivism and relativism. By distinguishing between hierarchical and lateral religious difference, it is possible to avoid the depiction of *taqwā* as captive within one reified, lateral *umma,* and also to avoid the depiction of *taqwā* as some sort of relativistic and amorphous form of belief.

It is also by distinguishing between hierarchical and lateral religious difference that it becomes possible to account for the full complexity of the proximate other, the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other. Difference is no longer conceived of as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries. Difference is rather the dynamic intersection between two semantic fields, the dynamic convergences that produce various (perhaps even infinite) combinations of proximity and otherness. As such, the choice is no longer between prioritizing sameness and proximity to the detriment of otherness, or neglecting the intricacies of proximity through isolation and linear hierarchies. The only choice is to focus on the intersections themselves, to examine the diverse convergences of proximity and otherness without collapsing the two or depicting them in a static or exclusive relationship.

If the lateral communitarian boundaries can no longer be seen as corresponding exactly with the hierarchical concepts, then it is necessary to develop a much more complex appreciation of the *taqwā*-related concepts themselves.[165] If both the positive and negative

[165] While not carried out in this study, the semantic field of *umma*, lateral religious difference, is equally worthy of additional exploration. Such exploration could examine the referents of the various *umma*, as well as the facts

hierarchical concepts are mobile, then it is not possible to rely upon simple, static threshold criteria intended to designate boundaries. If our aim is to identify and comprehend *taqwā* or the lack thereof, a much more complex understanding is needed, an understanding that goes beyond Izutsu's conceptual opposition and subsumption, to explicate the nuances of and relationships between the hierarchical concepts themselves. It is to this task that I turn in the following chapter.

---

that lateral *umma* undergo change (i.e., are not static entities) and have complex relationships with other lateral *umma*. This would further illuminate the difficulties with defining the boundaries of *umam* themselves.

Chapter Eight

Relational Mapping of the Semantic Field of *Taqwā*: Concepts of Hierarchical Religious Difference

1. Introduction

The distinction between hierarchical and lateral religious difference within the Qurʾān not only provides a new way to approach the Qurʾānic discourse, but it also makes it possible to account more fully for both the proximity and otherness of the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other. However, failure to account effectively for the proximate religious other is not only a result of the conflation and/or undifferentiated aligning of Qurʾānic concepts of hierarchical religious difference with lateral religious communities. Failure to account for the proximate religious other is also a result of the manner in which hierarchical religious concepts themselves—those concepts that inhabit the semantic field of *taqwā*—have been understood and analyzed. Izutsu exemplifies this in his overriding conceptual opposition and his subsuming of evaluative concepts under other evaluative concepts. Similarly, in the historical Islamic approaches, great emphasis was placed on distinguishing between the various concepts and identifying simple threshold criteria with which to mark those distinctions unambiguously.

In reconceptualizing the Qurʾānic concepts of hierarchical religious difference as all being situated in the semantic field of *taqwā*, I have intended to deconstruct the absolutely oppositional characterization of *īmān* and *kufr*, and to emphasize the importance and complexity of other previously subsumed concepts. In this new schematization, the primary

question is not how *īmān* is distinguished from *kufr*, nor is it even the historical preoccupation with how *īmān* is or is not distinguished from *islām*. The primary question becomes how each concept relates directly to the core facets of *taqwā*. This does not mean that the concepts themselves are not related, but rather that it is through reference to and in comparison with the central concept of *taqwā* that the complexities and the nuances of both the individual concepts and their interrelationships are more effectively grasped.

In this chapter, therefore, I will explore the concepts of *īmān*, *islām*, *ḥanīf*, *kufr*, *shirk*, and *nifāq* in reference to the central aspects of *taqwā* explicated in Chapter Seven. I have grouped those central aspects into three primary themes: recognition of and attitude towards God; response to God's guidance; and type and nature of actions. In relation to each theme, I will highlight essential characteristics of these concepts and interconnections among them. In carrying out an examination of this nature, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are many possible topics that could be explored. I have selected prominent themes, but this is in no way an exhaustive examination. For instance, since each of these concepts can be envisioned as the focus-word of its own semantic field, it would be possible to expand the analysis to include those concepts that are situated as key-terms in their respective fields.

Throughout this exploration, I will draw upon some of the analysis of these concepts offered by Izutsu and Esack.[1] As already discussed, I will not adopt Izutsu's conclusions or depiction of the Qurʾānic worldview, but some components of his analysis are very perceptive. Moreover, it is worth noting that Izutsu's focus on the topic of salvation is to some extent similar to what I will undertake in this chapter. Izutsu compares various Qurʾānic concepts to the topic of salvation in order to illuminate similarities and dissimilarities between the

[1] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*; Izutsu, *God and Man*; Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*.

concepts.[2] Where Izutsu falls short is that he ultimately structures his entire depiction of the Qurʾānic worldview on the basis of this singular point of thematic intersection. I will diverge from Izutsu's singular focus and explore the concepts in relation to multiple points of intersection, aiming to illuminate—without eventual subsumption—similarities, differences, overlaps, and gradations in the Qurʾānic web.

Esack explores Qurʾānic concepts and categories, including *īmān*, *islām*, *kufr*, and *mushrikūn*, in order to challenge their depiction as static and reified entities.[3] In doing so, he highlights, for example, the degrees and fluctuation of *īmān;*[4] the active and conscious nature of *kufr*;[5] and the exceptions related to negative evaluations of the *mushrikūn*.[6] The commitment to problematizing boundaries and illuminating complexity is something that this study shares with the work of Esack.[7] However, in this chapter, I assume a different approach to the topic. Rather than exploring the nuances and complexities of each concept in relative isolation from the others, I aim to explore their nuances and complexities in relation to one another by discussing them in reference to the central themes derived from *taqwā*. My analysis, therefore, aims to expand upon the work of Esack in two ways: first, by exploring additional concepts and, second, by focusing on the complex relationality that exists between the concepts.

As previously indicated in reference to the concept of *ḥanīf*, the number of occurrences of each of the concepts varies greatly. Additionally, the concepts are expressed in a variety of

[2] I will not revisit the topic of salvation in this chapter. See Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 122-131. See also Izutsu, *God and Man*, 86-96.
[3] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 114-115.
[4] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 117.
[5] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 136.
[6] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"63.
[7] Esack, "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*,"62.

grammatical forms.[8] The following table indicates the frequency and forms of occurrence for each concept.

Frequency and Form of Occurrence within the Qurʾān					
Concept	Root	Total	Noun	Verb	Participle/Adj.
ḥanīf[9]	*H-N-F*	12	12		
islām[10]	*S-L-M* (form IV)	72	8	22	42
īmān[11]	*ʿ-M-N* (form IV)	827	45	550	232
nifāq[12]	*N-F-Q* (form III)	37	3	2	32
shirk[13]	*SH-R-K* (form I, IV)	165	45	71	29
kufr[14]	*K-F-R* (form I)	504	37	289	158/17

From this table, it is evident that *īmān* and *kufr* far exceed the other concepts in terms of frequency. While this variance can be read as an indication of the relative importance of concepts, this is not always the case. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the concept of *islām*. Although the term *islām* itself appears only eight times, it plays a profoundly important role in the Qurʾānic discourse on religious difference.

[8] In this chapter, I have chosen to use the phrase "those who manifest": for example those who manifest *islām*. While somewhat unwieldy, it more accurately captures the dynamic nature of the concepts, and it also helps to prevent the depiction of the concepts as referring to reified groups.
[9] See Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʾān* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 535. Another resource that I have utilized throughout this chapter is The Qurʾānic Arabic Corpus from the Language Research Group at the University of Leeds, available online at http://corpus.quran.com/.
[10] See Kassis, *Concordance*, 1079-1081.
[11] See Kassis, *Concordance*, 149-169.
[12] See Kassis, *Concordance*, 821-822.
[13] See Kassis, *Concordance*, 1144-1147.
[14] See Kassis, *Concordance*, 637-647.

2. Recognition of and Attitude towards God

The manifestation of *taqwā* in relation to God is a combination of mindfulness, awe, fear, belief and worship. The *muttaqūn* are those who recognize God's existence and understand God's power. Intimately tied to this recognition of God is certainty about the Hereafter and God's ultimate judgment of all humankind. How are the various forms of hierarchical difference (i.e., the concepts) related to these aspects of *taqwā*? As I will discuss, the Qurʾān depicts all individuals as recognizing the existence of God. However, what is the nature of that recognition? Do individuals who manifest these various forms of hierarchical difference recognize God in different ways? Do they fear God and understand God's power? What is their perspective on the Hereafter?

One of most striking aspects of the Qurʾānic discourse is that it does not discuss people who do not recognize the existence of God.[15] In other words, there is no discourse that is aimed at atheism or a group of people that could be considered atheists.[16] All of humanity is depicted as acknowledging the existence of God. Part of the reason why the Qurʾānic discourse does not address atheism is tied to the presentation of human nature, the *fiṭra*. The *fiṭra* is created to know *taqwā*;[17] this is the initial and essential state of every human being. Moreover, the Qurʾān depicts every individual as testifying at the moment of creation to the existence and status of God:

> *When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied,*

[15] Mustansir Mir, "Polytheism and Atheism," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4, 158.
[16] This is an especially important point in reference to common English translations of some of the hierarchical concepts. For example, *kāfir* has been commonly translated as "unbeliever," thereby implying the utter absence of belief. (For example, see ʿAbdullah Yusuf Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* [Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2004.])
[17] Qurʾān 91:7-8: "By the soul and how He formed it and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety (*taqwā*)!" وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

> *'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this."*[18]

Therefore, the Qurʾānic discourse is not primarily concerned with impelling the basic acknowledgment of the existence of God, but rather with guiding people to acknowledge God in a correct and sustained fashion, that is, in a fashion consistent with *taqwā:*

> *If you ask them [people] who created the heavens and earth and who harnessed the sun and moon, they are sure to say, 'God.' Then how are they deluded? It is God who gives abundantly to whichever of His servants He will, and sparingly to whichever He will: He has full knowledge of everything. If you ask them, 'Who sends water down from the sky and gives life with it to the earth after it has died?' they are sure to say, 'God.' Say, 'Praise belongs to God!' Truly, most of them do not use their reason* (taʿqilūn)*.*[19]

As the preceding *āya* indicates, people acknowledge God, especially in terms of God's role as creator and sustainer. This *āya*, however, also indicates that the acknowledgement is not constant; people become deluded, fail to be grateful, and fail to use their reason (ʿ*aql*) to understand the true status and power of God. Qurʾān 10:22-23 depicts a similar oscillation between recognition and ingratitude:

> *It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favoring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape. Then they pray to God, professing sincere devotion to Him* (mukhliṣīna)*, 'If You save us from this we shall be truly thankful.' Yet no sooner does He save them than, back on land, they behave outrageously against all that is right. People! Your outrageous behavior only works against yourselves. Take your little enjoyment in this present life; in the end you will return to Us and We shall confront you with everything you have done.*[20]

In moments of dire crisis, people call upon God, knowing that it is God alone that can save them. They promise gratitude in return, yet when they are safe they forget God and behave in

---

[18] Qurʾān 7:172: وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُواْ بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُواْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

[19] Qurʾān 29:61-63: وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ
اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاء مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ
وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّن نَّزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاء مَاء فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِن بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

[20] Qurʾān 10:22-23:
هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّى إِذَا كُنتُمْ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَجَرَيْنَ بِهِم بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُواْ بِهَا جَاءتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِن كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُّواْ أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُاْ اللّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَـذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ
فَلَمَّا أَنجَاهُمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ عَلَى أَنفُسِكُم مَّتَاعَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ إِلَينَا مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

a manner inconsistent with *taqwā*. This *āya* illustrates the primary Qurʾānic concern with actively and appropriately sustaining the acknowledgement of God. *Taqwā* is something that must be constantly striven for and sustained, not simply achieved or professed. The people described in this *āya* profess sincere devotion, but then they falter in that devotion and divert from it.

It is this depiction of humankind—that is, as knowing that God exists yet being challenged in their ability to sustain and manifest *taqwā*—that forms the backdrop of the Qurʾānic discourse on hierarchical religious difference; the various concepts thus do not denote whether people acknowledge God, but rather the manner in which they do so. Do they recognize God's power? Do they fear God? Do they take God as their only protector?

Īmān

The concept of *īmān* exists, of course, in a positive relationship with *taqwā*. Part of the reason for this is due to the fact that *īmān* is associated with individuals who fear God and put their full trust (*tawakkul*) in God alone:

> *True believers* (muʾminūn) *are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord.*[21]

> *God! There is no god but Him, so let the faithful* (muʾminūn) *put their trust in Him.*[22]

The fact that they fear and trust God is intimately connected to their recognition of God's unique status; they recognize that there is no power except the power of God. This also implies that they do not place fear of other beings before their fear of God:

> *It is Satan who urges you to fear his followers; do not fear them, but fear Me, if you are true believers* (muʾminīn).[23]

---

[21] Qurʾān 8:2: إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

[22] Qurʾān 64:13: اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

> *Those whose faith* (īmān) *only increased when people said, 'Fear your enemy: they have amassed a great army against you,' and who replied, 'God is enough for us: He is the best protector.'*[24]

The preceding *āya* describes their conception of God's power and role as protector, but it also depicts the behavior that those who manifest *īmān* display when faced with difficulties. In the face of human threats, their *īmān* increases. This is notable because it emphasizes that *īmān*, like *taqwā,* has levels and can always be increased.[25] It is also significant because it indicates that those with *īmān* will not be exempted from trials and hardships. In fact, the Qurʾān explicitly states that those with *īmān*—along with all other humans—will be tested:

> *We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But give good news to those who are steadfast* (ṣābirīn)*, those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.' These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.*[26]

> *Did you think you would enter the Garden without God first proving which of you would struggle for His cause and remain steadfast* (ṣābirīn)*?*[27]

Humans will be tested and assessed by God based upon their responses to those tests. As these *āyāt* indicate, the most appropriate response is to remain steadfast, that is, to consistently demonstrate *ṣabr*. Once again, this aligns with the active and continuous nature of *taqwā*. Neither *taqwā* nor *īmān* are about profession alone; they are not things that an individual can simply claim to have; rather, they must be continuously and deliberately enacted.[28]

As a result of the recognition of God's singular status and power, those who manifest *īmān* do not mix or combine their belief in and worship of God with other beliefs and practices that may compromise that recognition:

---

[23] Qurʾān 3:175: إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءهُ فَلاَ تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُونِ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

[24] Qurʾān 3:173: الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُواْ لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَاناً وَقَالُواْ حَسْبُنَا اللّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

[25] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 117.

[26] Qurʾān 2:155-157: وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوفْ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الأَمْوَالِ وَالأنفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ
الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُواْ إِنَّا لِلّهِ وَإِنَّـا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعونَ
أُولَـئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَـئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

[27] Qurʾān 3:142: أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُواْ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُواْ مِنكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ

[28] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 135.

> *It is those who have faith* (alladhīna āmanū)*, and do not mix their faith with wrongdoing, who will be secure, and it is they who are rightly guided.'*[29]

> *Say, 'Disbelievers* (kāfirūn)*, I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship: you have your religion and I have mine.'*[30]

Sūrat al-kāfirūn also indicates that those who manifest *īmān* are forthcoming about their perspective and the distinction between it and other perspectives. Another vital feature of this *sūra* is that although it indicates an inherent evaluation of *kufr*, it does not append any automatic action to that evaluation. In other words, the evaluation does not necessitate action to eliminate the negatively-evaluated form of hierarchical difference. *Kufr* is not regarded positively, but people who manifest *īmān* are not charged with the responsibility of eradicating *kufr*. This is confirmed in the Qurʾānic depiction of the role of messengers. Even messengers, including Muḥammad, are sent only to warn, not to compel *īmān*:

> *'And [I am commanded] to recite the Qurʾān.' Whoever chooses to follow the right path does so for his own good. Say to whoever deviates from it, 'I am only here to warn.'*[31]

> *We know best what they say. You are not there to force them, so remind, with this Qurʾān, those who fear My warning.*[32]

Three other notable characteristics of those who manifest *īmān* are that they do not have doubt, they are thankful for God's blessings, and they are humble in their relationship to God:

> *The true believers* (muʾminūn) *are the ones who have faith* (āmanū) *in God and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind …*[33]

> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū)*, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship.*[34]

---

[29] Qurʾān 6:82: الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُواْ إِيمَانَهُم بِظُلْمٍ أُوْلَـئِكَ لَهُمُ الأَمْنُ وَهُم مُّهْتَدُونَ

[30] Qurʾān 109:1-6: قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ
وَلَا أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدتُّمْ
وَلَا أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

[31] Qurʾān 27:92: وَأَنْ أَتْلُوَ الْقُرْآنَ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَى فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ

[32] Qurʾān 50:45: نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ وَمَا أَنتَ عَلَيْهِم بِجَبَّارٍ فَذَكِّرْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مَن يَخَافُ وَعِيدِ

[33] Qurʾān 49:15 (excerpt): إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا …

> *But those who believed* (alladhīna āmanū)*, did good deeds, and humbled* (ʾakhbatū) *themselves before their Lord will be companions in Paradise and there they will stay.*[35]
>
> *Prosperous are the believers* (muʾminūn)*! Those who pray humbly* (khāshiʿūn) *…*[36]

The significance of gratitude and humility will become more evident in the following discussions of other concepts. However, at this juncture, it is worth noting that the humility that those who manifest *īmān* display in this world is the same posture assumed by all humans on the Day of Judgment:

> *On that Day, people will follow the summoner from whom there is no escape; every voice will be humbled* (khashaʿat) *for the Lord of Mercy; only whispers will be heard.*[37]
>
> *On the Day when the blast reverberates and the second blast follows, hearts will tremble and eyes will be cast down in humility* (khāshiʿatun)*.*[38]

On that Day, the trait that they have adopted by choice will be the trait that all people assume by necessity. In further reference to the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter, it is not surprising to find that the Qurʾān describes those with *īmān* as those who believe in the Hereafter:

> *The believers* (alladhīna āmanū)*, the Jews, the Nazarenes, and the Sabians—all those who believe* (āmana) *in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[39]

This belief is integrally connected to their acknowledgment of God's power; they stand in awe of God and their hearts tremble in the face of God's power. Moreover, the fact that those who manifest *īmān* have firm conviction in the Judgment and Hereafter is corroborated by descriptions of their future discussions with others on the Day of the Resurrection:

> *On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour—they have always been deluded—but those endowed with knowledge and faith* (īmān)

---

[34] Qurʾān 2:172: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ كُلُواْ مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُواْ لِلّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

[35] Qurʾān 11:23: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَخْبَتُواْ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ أُوْلَـئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

[36] Qurʾān 23:1-2: قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ

[37] Qurʾān 20:108: يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَّبِعُونَ الدَّاعِيَ لَا عِوَجَ لَهُ وَخَشَعَت الْأَصْوَاتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ فَلَا تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا هَمْسًا

[38] Qurʾān 79:6-9: يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ تَتْبَعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ
قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ

[39] Qurʾān 2:62: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَالَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحاً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

> *will say, 'In accordance with God's decree, you actually lingered till the Day of Resurrection: this is the Day of Resurrection, yet you did not know.'*[40]

Those who had knowledge and manifested *īmān* in the world will recognize the Day of Resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promise.

Shirk

Shirk is commonly translated as either idolatry or polytheism,[41] but the term can also be translated more broadly as associationism. Those who manifest *shirk* are those who associate things with God or ascribe partners to God. As Gerald Hawting argues, the concept of *shirk* in the Qurʾān is not confined to literal idolatry (i.e., the worship of idols) or polytheism (i.e., the worship of multiple Gods).[42] These may be some of the concrete manifestations of *shirk*, but the Qurʾān does not limit *shirk* to these forms;

> sometimes the nature of the thing thus venerated is left unspecified and anonymous in phrases such as: those who are worshipped/called upon before/other than God, those who are taken as patrons/friends (*awliyaʾ*) before God, and those who are taken as 'equals/peers' (*andād*) before God.[43]

The unspecified nature of the discourse means that *shirk* must be envisioned as any act of associating partners with God. This includes following one's desires in a slavish fashion, as well as envisioning human power to be on par with God's power.[44]

---

[40] Qurʾān 30:55-56: وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ كَذَلِكَ كَانُوا يُؤْفَكُونَ
وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَالْإِيمَانَ لَقَدْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْبَعْثِ فَهَذَا يَوْمُ الْبَعْثِ وَلَكِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

[41] For example, see Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*.

[42] Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 48. See also Gerald R. Hawting, "Idolatry and Idolaters," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, 475. While I agree with certain contentions made by Hawting, I do not embrace his argument that the Qurʾānic passages should be understood as polemic. (See Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 47.)

[43] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 50-51.

[44] Mir, "Polytheism and Atheism," 158. For example, see Qurʾān 25:43, 2:258.

Although those who manifest *shirk* ascribe partners to God—seeking assistance and protection from those partners—this does not mean that they do not recognize God's power. Many *āyāt* testify to the contrary:

> *When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favor from God, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path. Say, 'Enjoy your ingratitude* (kufr) *for a little while: you will be one of the inhabitants of the Fire."*[45]

When tested with affliction, those who manifest *shirk* initially behave similarly to those with *īmān*; they turn to God and seek God's protection and favors. This turning to God in times of crisis is a clear indication that they recognize and do not deny God's power. They turn to God for help because they know God can help them. However, when their affliction subsides or when they are granted favors, they forget God and set up rivals. In other words, they are not steadfast in their recognition of and dependence on God. They also lack appreciation for the favors they are granted. It is important to highlight the term used to indicate their ingratitude: *kufr*. As Izutsu notes, the concept of *kufr* can imply either ingratitude or disbelief.[46] In this context, the concept is utilized to underscore the ingratitude of those who manifest *shirk*.

It is possible, therefore, to argue that the main Qurʾānic contention with those who manifest *shirk* is not that they have no appreciation of God's status and power, but rather that they have a limited appreciation and flawed conception of that power. They do not recognize every aspect of God's power. Hawting makes a similar assertion:

> The gist of the koranic criticism is that although the opponents know that God is the creator and regulator of the universe, and although they appeal to Him in times of distress, regularly they fall back into something that it views as less than total monotheism.[47]

---

[45] Qurʾān 39:8:
وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلَهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنْهُ نَسِيَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُو إِلَيْهِ مِن قَبْلُ وَجَعَلَ لِلَّهِ أَندَادًا لِّيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِ قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ
[46] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 135-144.
[47] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 62.

Hawting expounds this lack of total monotheism, or complete recognition of God's power, by discussing the distinction between *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*.[48] Those who manifest *shirk* have the former, meaning they recognize God as the Creator and Sustainer, but they do not have the latter, meaning they do not have a full conception of God as God. This can be clarified with reference to the description of God presented in *Sūrat al-ḥashr*:

> *He is God: there is no god other than Him. It is He who knows what is hidden as well as what is in the open, He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. He is God: there is no god other than Him, the Controller, the Holy One, Source of Peace, Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Truly Great; God is far above anything they consider to be His partner* (yushrikūn)*. He is God: the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. The best names belong to Him. Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him: He is the Almighty, the Wise.*[49]

As these *āyāt* indicate, God is much more than the Creator and Sustainer; God is also the only protector, the only granter mercy, and the one with complete knowledge.

These *āyāt* also introduce another facet of the Qurʾānic critique of those who manifest *shirk*. It is not only that they have a partial conception of God's power and associate partners with God. It is also that those partners and false protectors have no real power whatsoever:

> *It is God who created you and provided for you, who will cause you to die and then give you life again. Which of your 'partners' can do any one of these things? Glory be to God, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him* (yushrikūna)*.*[50]

> *They worship alongside God things that can neither harm nor benefit them, and say, 'These are our intercessors with God.' Say, 'Do you think you can tell God about something He knows not to exist in the heavens or earth? Glory be to Him! He is far above the partner-gods they associate with Him* (yushrikūna)*!*[51]

Qurʾān 10:18 again emphasizes the fact that those who manifest *shirk* do have some conception of God's power; they say that the other things they worship will be their intercessors with God.

---

[48] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 63.

[49] Qurʾān 59:22-24: هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاء الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

[50] Qurʾān 30:40: اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ هَلْ مِن شُرَكَائِكُم مَّن يَفْعَلُ مِن ذَلِكُم مِّن شَيْءٍ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

[51] Qurʾān 10:18: وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لاَ يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلاَ يَنفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَـؤُلاء شُفَعَاؤُنَا عِندَ اللَّهِ قُلْ أَتُنَبِّئُونَ اللَّهَ بِمَا لاَ يَعْلَمُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلاَ فِي الأَرْضِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

While the Qurʾān denies the reality of intercession elsewhere,[52] their acknowledgment of the need for intercession is an implicit acknowledgement of God's status and power.

Their misconception of God's power is also evident in their contention that God could have prevented them from associating partners if God had so desired:

> *Those who associate others with God* (alladhīna ʾashrakū) *say, 'If God had willed, we would not have worshipped anything but Him, nor would our fathers. We would not have declared anything forbidden without His sanction' ...*[53]

Certainly God *could* prevent such a thing, but those who manifest *shirk* lack true understanding of God's relationship with humanity. As discussed in Chapter Seven, God does not compel *taqwā*; rather, God orders *taqwā* and humans choose whether or not to strive for it. What is intriguing is that other *āyāt* indicate that those who manifest *shirk* actually do so in order to move closer to God:

> *Sincere devotion* (al-dīn al-khāliṣ) *is due to God alone. Those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, 'We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God,' God Himself will judge between them regarding their differences. God does not guide any ungrateful liar.*[54]

This creates a more complex scenario than the simple equation of *shirk* with utter disbelief. While the claim that they worship other things in order to move closer to God can be read as an excuse, it can also be interpreted as a forthright statement. Both possibilities exist within the Qurʾānic depiction of *shirk*. There may be those whose primary allegiance is to the partners or things they associate with God; there may also be those who truly believe that they need intermediaries in order to establish a relationship with God. The Qurʾān's response to both possibilities, however, is clear: devotion should be to God alone and devotion to God should be sincere and exclusive (*ikhlaṣ*).

---

[52] For example, see Qurʾān 6:70, 6:94, 7:53, 10:3, 32:4.

[53] Qurʾān 16:35 (excerpt): وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُواْ لَوْ شَاء اللّهُ مَا عَبَدْنَا مِن دُونِهِ مِن شَيْءٍ نَّحْنُ وَلا آبَاؤُنَا وَلاَ حَرَّمْنَا مِن دُونِهِ مِن شَيْءٍ ...

[54] Qurʾān 39:3:
أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِن دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاء مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ

Thus, as Hawting contends, the Qur'ān does not primarily juxtapose *shirk* with monotheism, but rather with *ikhlaṣ*, a form of monotheistic devotion that is devoid and any and all intermediaries.[55] However, there is another vital nuance to the comparison between *shirk* and *ikhlaṣ*. It is not the case that those who manifest *shirk* never manifest *ikhlaṣ*. In fact, there are times when they do:

> *Whenever they go on board a ship they call on God, and dedicate their faith to Him alone* (mukhliṣīn)*, but once He has delivered them safely back to land, see how they ascribe partners to Him* (yushrikūn)*!*[56]

This *āya* indicates—similar to Qurʾān 39:8—that they are capable of manifesting *ikhlaṣ*, but they are critiqued for failing to sustain that manifestation.

Those who manifest *shirk* are also described as denying the reality of the Hereafter:

> *Say [Prophet], 'I am only a mortal like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is One. Take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to the associators* (mushrikūn)*, who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe* (kāfirūn) *in the world to come!*[57]

Although the precise reason for this denial (*kufr*) is not made explicit, based on what has been discussed thus far in this section, there are certain conclusions that can be drawn. They do not deny the Hereafter as an automatic consequence of denying God or God's power. As has been demonstrated, they do not deny either. Their denial of the Hereafter, therefore, must be attributed to their flawed conception of God's power. Whereas they recognize God's power and dominion in certain arenas—such as creation and sustaining of the creation—they do not extend that recognition to the power to resurrect humankind after death. This view is confirmed in other *āyāt* that ask humans to reflect on creation as a proof of God's ability to effect the resurrection:

---

[55] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 61. See also Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 222.

[56] Qurʾān 29:65: فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

[57] Qurʾān 41:6-7: قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَى إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَاسْتَقِيمُوا إِلَيْهِ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُشْرِكِينَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُم بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

> *They also say, 'What? When we are turned to bones and dust, shall we really be raised up in a new act of creation?' Say, '[Yes] even if you were [as hard as] stone, or iron, or any other substance you think hard to bring to life.' Then they will say, 'Who will bring us back?' Say, 'The One who created you the first time' ...*[58]

It is also confirmed through descriptions of the Day of Judgment, a day when those who manifested *shirk* will learn that *all*—and *every*—power belongs to God:

> *Even so, there are some who choose to worship others besides God as rivals to Him, loving them with the love due to God, but the believers have greater love for God. If only the associators could see—as they will see when they face the torment—that all power belongs to God, and that God punishes severely.*[59]

Ḥanīf

As noted in Chapter Seven, the exact meaning of the term *ḥanīf* is a matter of debate. While scholars have variously suggested that it is related to the Syriac term for 'pagan' or that it means 'to incline' towards something,[60] the Qurʾānic concept of *ḥanīf* is best illuminated relationally. To begin, *ḥanīf* is frequently invoked in contrast to *shirk*:

> *Devote yourselves* (ḥunafāʾ) *to God and assign Him no partners* (mushrikīn)*, for the person who does so* (yushrik) *is like someone who has been hurled down from the skies and snatched up by the birds or flung to a distant place by the wind.*[61]

This contrast is further asserted through the connection of *ḥanīf* with *ikhlaṣ*;

> *Though all they are ordered to do is worship God alone, sincerely devoting* (mukhliṣīn) *their religion to Him as people of true faith* (ḥunafāʾ)*, keep up the prayer* (yuqīmū al-

---

[58] Qurʾān 7:49-51 (excerpt):
وَقَالُواْ أَئِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرُفَاتًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا
قُل كُونُواْ حِجَارَةً أَوْ حَدِيدًا
أَوْ خَلْقًا مِّمَّا يَكْبُرُ فِي صُدُورِكُمْ فَسَيَقُولُونَ مَن يُعِيدُنَا قُلِ الَّذِي فَطَرَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ...

[59] Qurʾān 2:165:
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللّهِ أَندَاداً يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِّلّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ إِذْ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلّهِ جَمِيعاً وَأَنَّ اللّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ

[60] See Rubin, "Ḥanīf," 402; Reynolds, *The Qurʾān,* 75-87. Reynolds aims to comprehend the term *ḥanīf* by exploring the text and subtext of the Qurʾān, meaning the Jewish and Christian literature that was written before the Qurʾān. He discusses various positions taken by translators of the Qurʾān, and he then examines Jewish and Christian accounts of Abraham. Reynolds connects the Qurʾānic discourse on Abraham with Paul's claim that Abraham preceded Mosaic Law and therefore was justified before circumcision. This enabled Paul to claim that Christianity was not an innovation of Judaism but rather "an ancient and primary religion" (83). Reynolds argues that the Qurʾān is attempting to make a similar exclusive and polemic claim on Abraham. While I do not agree with his ultimate conclusion, he work is nonetheless significant.

[61] Qurʾān 22:31:
حُنَفَاء لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ وَمَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ السَّمَاء فَتَخْطَفُهُ الطَّيْرُ أَوْ تَهْوِي بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٍ سَحِيقٍ

ṣalāt)*, and pay the prescribed alms, for that is the religion right and straight* (dīn al-qayyima)*.*[62]

Reflecting back to the previous discussion of *shirk*, it is important to note that a *ḥanīf* is not simply someone who manifests *ikhlaṣ* while those who manifest *shirk* do not. As indicated, those who manifest *shirk* display *ikhlaṣ* on some occasions and in certain circumstances. Therefore, the contrast between *ḥanīf* and those who manifest *shirk* relates to the manner in which *ikhlaṣ* is or is not sustained. A *ḥanīf* is someone who consistently sustains *ikhlaṣ* in relation to God, whereas one who manifests *shirk* falters in the expression of *ikhlaṣ*. Moreover, the sustained manifestation of *ikhlaṣ* characteristic of the *ḥanīf* is described as *dīn al-qayyima*, the correct or true religion.

The notion of sustained *ikhlaṣ* is further emphasized in other *āyāt* that use the expression "to turn one's face" toward something:

> *[Prophet], set your face towards religion as a man of pure faith* (ʾaqim wajhaka lil-dīni ḥanīfan)*. Do not be one of those who join partners with God* (mushrikīn)*.*[63]

> *So as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion* (ʾaqim wajhaka lil-dīni ḥanīfan)*. This is the natural disposition* (fiṭra) *God instilled in mankind—there is no altering God's creation—and this is the right religion* (al-dīn al-qayyim)*, though most people do not realize it.*[64]

> *I have turned my face* (wajjahtu wajhiya) *as a true believer* (ḥanīf) *towards Him who created the heavens and the earth. I am not one of the associators* (mushrikīn)*."*[65]

There are a variety of significant elements to these *āyāt*. First, the expression "to turn one's face" means to devote oneself wholly and constantly to something, to orient one's whole being towards a singular object, that is, God. This is precisely what those who manifest *shirk* fail to

[62] Qurʾān 98:4-5: وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ
وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاء وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ

[63] Qurʾān 10:105: وَأَنْ أَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا وَلاَ تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

[64] Qurʾān 30:30: فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

[65] Qurʾān 6:79: إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَاْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

do; they turn occasionally towards God but then they turn back. This is further illuminated in reference to the definition of *birr* provided in Qurʾān 2:177:

> *Goodness* (al-birr) *does not consist in turning your face towards East or West …*[66]

In contrast with *shirk*, *birr*, *taqwā* and *ḥanīf* are linked with turning one's face in a singular direction in a consistent fashion. The emphasis on sustained devotion, that characterizes the *ḥanīf*, is also evoked through the imperative *ʾaqim*. This verb means to establish something and then to perform that action in an ongoing manner. For example, the most frequent occurrence of this verb is in the context of prayer. As in the previously cited Qurʾān 98:4-5, people are told to "*yuqīmū al-ṣalāt*." This does not mean to simply pray, but rather to pray in an ongoing and constant manner, to establish prayer as a pattern of behavior. Therefore, in the context of these verses about *ḥanīf*, the appearance of the imperative *ʾaqim* underscores the emphasis on upholding devotion to God. Qurʾān 30:30 also introduces the connection between *ḥanīf* and *fiṭra*. As the only occurrence of the noun *fiṭra* within the entire Qurʾān, it is conspicuous. To be *ḥanīf* is the natural disposition of humankind; humankind is created to incline towards God, created to turn one's face towards God. This confirms the intimate relation between *ḥanīf* and *taqwā* because, as discussed, the human soul is created to know *taqwā*.

The concept of *ḥanīf* is also closely associated with the figure of Abraham:

> *[Prophet] say, 'God speaks the truth, so follow Abraham's religion: he had true faith* (ḥanīf) *and he was never an associator* (mushrikīn).[67]

> *Who could be better in religion than those who submit themselves wholly* (*ʾaslama wajhahu*) *to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith* (ḥanīf)*? …*[68]

> *Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Nazarene. He was upright and devoted to God* (ḥanīf muslim)*, never an associator* (mushrikīn).[69]

---

[66] Qurʾān 2:177 (excerpt): لَّيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ …

[67] Qurʾān 3:95: قُلْ صَدَقَ اللهُ فَاتَّبِعُواْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

[68] Qurʾān 4:125 (excerpt): وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لله وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ واتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا …

Abraham is depicted as the archetypal *ḥanīf*, and to follow Abraham's religion or way is the ideal path, even for Muḥammad. Abraham's depiction in the Qurʾān relates largely to his relationship with his father and his community, all of whom engaged in *shirk*, even literal idolatry. Abraham is presented as someone who had no interest in engaging in *shirk*, and actually vigorously argued with his people against *shirk*:

> *His people argued with him, and he said, 'How can you argue with me about God when He has guided me? I do not fear anything you associate* (tushrikūna) *with Him: unless my Lord wills [nothing can happen]. My Lord encompasses everything in His knowledge. How can you not take heed? Why should I fear what you associate* (ʾashraktum) *with Him? Why do you not fear to associate* (ʾashraktum) *with Him things for which He has sent you no authority? Tell me, if you know the answer, which side has more right to feel secure?*[70]

This exchange is in many ways a recapitulation of the Qurʾānic critique of those who manifest *shirk*. Abraham underscores the true nature of God's power and the impotence of those things that are associated with God. Abraham also stresses the result that fear should be of nothing but God.

The preceding *āyāt* (Qurʾān 4:125 and 3:67) also connect the concept of *ḥanīf* with the concept of *islām*. Abraham is described as submitting "his face," that is his whole self, to God. Moreover, Abraham is placed not only in contrast with those who manifest *shirk*, but also in contrast with the Jews and Nazarenes. I will further explore this juxtaposition later in this chapter.

---

[69] Qurʾān 3:67: مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلاَ نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِن كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُّسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

[70] Qurʾān 6:80-81: وَحَآجَّهُ قَوْمُهُ قَالَ أَتُحَاجُّونِّي فِي اللهِ وَقَدْ هَدَانِ وَلاَ أَخَافُ مَا تُشْرِكُونَ بِهِ إِلاَّ أَن يَشَاء رَبِّي شَيْئًا وَسِعَ رَبِّي كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا أَفَلاَ تَتَذَكَّرُونَ وَكَيْفَ أَخَافُ مَا أَشْرَكْتُمْ وَلاَ تَخَافُونَ أَنَّكُمْ أَشْرَكْتُم بِاللهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطَانًا فَأَيُّ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ أَحَقُّ بِالأَمْنِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

KUFR

As discussed in reference to the concept of *shirk*, the concept of *kufr* is associated in part with ingratitude.[71] Individuals manifest *kufr* when they display a lack of appreciation for God's abundant favors upon them:

> *If you tried to count God's favors you could never calculate them: man is truly unjust and ungrateful* (kaffār).[72]

Kufr, however, is also associated with disbelief. In fact, Izutsu argues that this dual association renders *kufr* "semantically ambiguous."[73] In other words, in many circumstances it becomes "difficult to draw a sharp line of demarcation between them ... the two are connected with each other in Qurʾanic thought by a firm conceptual link."[74] Izutsu's observation is intriguing, especially in light of the strict demarcation that he draws between *kufr* and other concepts. If *kufr* is semantically ambiguous, then this would seem to imply that such distinctions may be less than apparent. While Izutsu claims that both ingratitude and disbelief can only end in the denial of the oneness of God,[75] this does not appear to hold true in all situations. Certainly ingratitude is a negative trait, but it is also a trait that manifests periodically in much of humanity. It is even a trait that those who manifest *īmān* could potentially display:

> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū)*, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship.*[76]

The *āya* is a reminder to those who manifest *īmān* to remain grateful if they truly worship God, and thus indicates the potential for any person to display ingratitude. No person rests in a position of security from this possibility.

---

[71] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 136-140.
[72] Qurʾān 14:34 (excerpt): ... وَإِن تَعُدُّواْ نِعْمَتَ اللّهِ لاَ تُحْصُوهَا إِنَّ الإِنسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ
[73] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 140.
[74] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 141.
[75] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 148.
[76] Qurʾān 2:172: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ كُلُواْ مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُواْ لِلّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

With respect to *kufr* as disbelief, it is also necessary to unpack further the meaning of disbelief. As stated at the beginning of this section, the Qurʾān does not discuss any people who do not recognize the existence of God. Therefore, *kufr* cannot be understood as a simple absence of belief. This is confirmed in *āyāt* that critique individuals for rejecting and denying God's signs. These individuals are described as displaying *kufr*, yet believing to some degree. They may believe only a little, but they do have some belief:

> *They say, 'Our hearts are impenetrably wrapped [against whatever you say],' but God has rejected them for their disbelief* (kufrihim)*: they have little faith* (yuʾminūn)*.*[77]

> *And so for breaking their pledge, for rejecting God's revelations, for unjustly killing their prophets, for saying 'Our hearts [minds] are closed'—No! God has sealed them in their disbelief* (kufrihim)*, so they believe* (yuʾminūna) *only a little.*[78]

The preceding *āyāt* also introduce the Qurʾānic depiction of the hearts of those who manifest *kufr*. Izutsu examines these descriptions in detail,[79] and therefore I will only offer a few comments on this aspect of the concept of *kufr*. The Qurʾān variously describes their hearts as wrapped, hard, sealed, veiled, and arrogant.[80] These descriptions should be considered in reference to the descriptions of the hearts of those who manifest *īmān*. Those who manifest *īmān* have hearts that tremble in response to God, hearts that are calm, and hearts that are humble.[81] One notable contrast that emerges through this comparison is that the hearts of those with *īmān* are defined through their relationship with God; whether it be fear, security or humility, each of these involves a relational element. The hearts of those who manifest *kufr*, however, are described as isolated and distant from the relationship with God. This can be the result of human action (i.e., veiling and hardening) but also the result of God's action (i.e.,

---

[77] Qurʾān 2:88: وَقَالُواْ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَل لَّعَنَهُمُ اللّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلاً مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ
See also Reynolds, *The Qurʾān,* 147-155. Reynolds explains this *āya* in light of the Biblical metaphor "our hearts are uncircumcised." This is a metaphor through which the Jews acknowledged the impurity of their hearts.
[78] Qurʾān 4:155: فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِم مِّيثَاقَهُمْ وَكُفْرِهِم بِآيَاتِ اللّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ الأَنْبِيَاء بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ طَبَعَ اللّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً
[79] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 144-148.
[80] For example, see Qurʾān 2:88, 4:155, 6:43, 2:74, 5:13, 2:6-7, 9:93, 17:45-46, 6:25, 6:43.
[81] For example, see Qurʾān 8:2, 22:35, 13:20, 13:28, 57:16, 22:54.

sealing). Another important observation regarding these descriptions is that they should not all be assumed to indicate exactly the same situation of *kufr*. Rather, they appear to be indications of different manifestations of *kufr*, of diverse ways in which individuals manifest disbelief.

One of the best ways to comprehend the various intricacies of the concept of *kufr* is in relation to the figure of Iblis, or Satan. Iblis is presented as a prototypical example of the manifestation of *kufr*:[82]

> *When We told the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed. But not Iblis, who refused and was arrogant: he was one of those who deny the truth* (kāfirīn).[83]

While the story of Iblis is recounted in various places throughout the Qurʾān, one of the most illuminating accounts appears in *Sūrat al-ʾaʿrāf*:

> *We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' and they did. But not Iblis: he was not one of those who bowed down. God said, 'What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?' and he said, 'I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay.' God said, 'Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!'*[84]

Iblis is here depicted as existing before humankind was created, and then being asked by God to bow down to the human creation. Iblis refuses to do so; when asked why, his rationale is that he is better than Adam. This reveals a number of essential characteristics of those who manifest *kufr*. First, they know God. Just like Iblis, they are well aware of God's existence, and even God's power. Iblis, for example, witnesses the creation of humankind. Thus, *kufr* does not emerge from lack of belief strictly speaking. Second, Iblis disobeys the command of God. Once again, the nuances are important. It is not that Iblis is ignorant of the commands of God, but

---

[82] Jane I. Smith, "Faith," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, 162.

[83] Qurʾān 2:34: (While not especially relevant in the context of this study, it is worth pointing out that, according to the Qurʾān, Iblis was not an angel, but rather a *jinn*. [See Qurʾān 18:50.])
وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلاَئِكَةِ اسْجُدُواْ لآدَمَ فَسَجَدُواْ إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

[84] Qurʾān 7:11-13:
وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلآئِكَةِ اسْجُدُواْ لآدَمَ فَسَجَدُواْ إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ
قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَاْ خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ
قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ

that Iblis deliberately and consciously refuses to follow them. Third, Iblis' rationale for not obeying is due to arrogance, due to an inflated sense of self. However, Iblis' arrogance derives from a distinct source. He considers himself to be better based upon the manner and substance of his creation; he was created from fire, and humans from only clay.[85] In other words, he assesses his own worth and the worth of other creations on the basis of divinely-intended difference (that is, lateral difference), rather than on the basis of *taqwā* as indicated in Qurʾān 49:13.

With regard to the Hereafter, the Qurʾān describes the views of those who manifest *kufr* in multiple ways. As with the multiple portrayals of the hearts of those who manifests *kufr*, it is tempting to collapse these descriptions into a generalized negative appraisal. However, this strategy is not well-suited to illuminating or comprehending complexities. There are three main perspectives on the Hereafter that are associated with the concept of *kufr*: doubt, denial and exclusivism. In reference to the first, those who manifest *kufr* are depicted as having doubt about the Day of Judgment until the moment that it actually arrives:

> *The disbelievers* (alladhīna kafarū) *will remain in doubt about it until the Hour suddenly overpowers them or until torment descends on them on a Day devoid of all hope.*[86]

While doubt is the result of a lack of full conviction,[87] it is not the same as outright denial of the Hereafter. However, other *āyāt* do describe those who manifest *kufr* as denying the resurrection and the Day of Judgment:

> *They say, 'There is nothing beyond our life in this world: we shall not be raised from the dead.' If you could only see, when they are made to stand before their Lord, how He will say, 'Is this not real?' They will say, 'Yes indeed, by our Lord.' He will say, 'Then taste the torment for having disbelieved* (takfurūna)*.' Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with their Lord until, when the Hour suddenly arrives, they say, 'Alas for us that we*

[85] See also, Qurʾān 15: 33.
[86] Qurʾān 22:55: وَلَا يَزَالُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّنْهُ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمٍ عَقِيمٍ
[87] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 143.

disregarded this!' They will bear their burdens on their backs. How terrible those burdens will be![88]

What is remarkable about these *āyāt* is that, although those who manifest *kufr* flatly deny the Hereafter in this world, when questioned by God, they will readily admit that they were wrong. In attempting to explicate the reason for their denial, Izutsu contends that those who manifest *kufr* deny the Hereafter and judgment due to their reliance on reason. He states that their rationalism in particular leads them to reject the resurrection as "absurd and fantastic."[89] This assertion, however, does not seem to comply with the overarching depiction of reason in the Qurʾān. As discussed in relation to the *fiṭra* in Chapter Seven, reason is seen as a faculty instilled in humans in order that they may reflect on *āyāt* and thereby gain a true appreciation of God.[90] Therefore, while the explanation for this denial is not made explicit, it does not seem to be caused by an excessive dependence on reason.

The third perspective associated with those who manifest *kufr* is the assertion that the rewards of the Hereafter will be for them, or their group, exclusively:

They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Nazarene.' This is their own wishful thinking. Say, 'Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth.' In fact, any who devote themselves wholly to God (ʾaslama wajhahu) *and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[91]

Say, 'If the last home with God is to be for you alone and no one else, then you should long for death, if your claim is true.' But they will never long for death, because of what they have stored up with their own hands: God is fully aware of the evildoers.[92]

---

[88] Qurʾān 6:29-31:
وَقَالُواْ إِنْ هِيَ إِلاَّ حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْعُوثِينَ
وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذْ وُقِفُواْ عَلَى رَبِّهِمْ قَالَ أَلَيْسَ هَذَا بِالْحَقِّ قَالُواْ بَلَى وَرَبِّنَا قَالَ فَذُوقُواْ العَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ
قَدْ خَسِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِلِقَاء اللهِ حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءتْهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً قَالُواْ يَا حَسْرَتَنَا عَلَى مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِيهَا وَهُمْ يَحْمِلُونَ أَوْزَارَهُمْ عَلَى ظُهُورِهِمْ أَلاَ سَاء مَا يَزِرُونَ

[89] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 142-143.

[90] For example, see Qurʾān 2:164.

[91] Qurʾān 2:111-112:
وَقَالُواْ لَن يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلاَّ مَن كَانَ هُوداً أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُواْ بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِندَ رَبِّهِ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

[92] Qurʾān 2:94-95:
قُلْ إِن كَانَتْ لَكُمُ الدَّارُ الآخِرَةُ عِندَ اللهِ خَالِصَةً مِّن دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُاْ الْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
وَلَن يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ

Qurʾān 2:111-112—which should be understood as referring to those among the Jews and Nazarenes who engage in *kufr*—not only shows the exclusive claim to rewards, but it also contrasts this claim with the concept of *islām*. The reward is not for these groups exclusively, but rather for all individuals who devote themselves wholly to God. Moreover, these *āyāt* parallel Iblis' assertion that he is better than humans, as the assertion made in these *āyāt* is also an example of attempting to evaluate based on lateral difference. The response to this attempt is a reassertion that evaluation will be carried out only on the basis of hierarchical difference, only on the basis of whether one manifests *taqwā* and *islām*.

Qurʾān 2:94-95, which refers to a group of people among the followers of Moses who manifested *kufr*, indicates a similar exclusive claim to rewards. It also, however, reveals that, although they make such claims, they do not wish for the Day of Judgment. The Qurʾān is highlighting an incongruity in their thought; if they are automatically privileged in the Hereafter, why would they not wish for the Hereafter? The reason is made clear: they know they are at fault, and they know they will be judged. Once again, this confirms the fact that those who manifest *kufr* recognize God's existence and God's power.

Islām

The concept of *islām* has already been encountered a number of times in this section. As demonstrated, it has a very close relationship with *ḥanīf* and the figure of Abraham. Due to this, it is not surprising to find *islām* commonly juxtaposed with *shirk* and closely connected with *ikhlaṣ*:

> *Say, 'Instead of God, are we to call on what neither profits nor harms us? [Are we to] turn on our heels after God has guided us, like someone bewildered, having been tempted by devils into a desert ravine, though his companions call him to guidance, "Come to us"?'*

> *Say, 'God's guidance is the true guidance. We are commanded to devote ourselves* (nuslima) *to the Lord of the Worlds.*[93]
>
> *Say, 'I have been commanded to serve God, dedicating my worship entirely* (mukhliṣ) *to Him. I have been commanded to be the first to submit* (muslimīn)*.'*[94]

Additionally, as in Qurʾān 4:125, the expression *ʾaslama wajhahu* appears numerous times to denote the absolute and steady nature of the submission of those who manifest *islām*:

> *In fact, any who direct themselves wholly* (ʾaslama wajhahu) *to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[95]
>
> *Whoever directs himself wholly* (yuslim wajhahu) *to God and does good work has grasped the surest handhold* (istamsaka bil-ʿurwati al-wuthqā)*, for the outcome of everything is with God.*[96]

To submit one's face or self in this manner is described in Qurʾān 31:22 as grasping the surest handhold. In others words, to submit one's self fully and consistently is the most secure and stable position in relation to God. The expression "*istamsaka bil-ʿurwati al-wuthqā*" is further elucidated by the only other occurrence of it in the Qurʾān:

> *There is no compulsion in religion* (dīn)*: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the firmest handhold* (istamsaka bil-ʿurwati al-wuthqā)*, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.*[97]

This *āya* indicates that the grasping of the surest handhold, associated with the concept of *islām*, is something that cannot be compelled. It is a decision that every individual must make freely, a decision that results from recognition of the clear distinction between guidance and error. Moreover, as long as they grasp this surest handhold, the relationship between God and

---

[93] Qurʾān 6:71:
قُلْ أَنَدْعُو مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لاَ يَنفَعُنَا وَلاَ يَضُرُّنَا وَنُرَدُّ عَلَى أَعْقَابِنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ كَالَّذِي اسْتَهْوَتْهُ الشَّيَاطِينُ فِي الأَرْضِ حَيْرَانَ لَهُ أَصْحَابٌ يَدْعُونَهُ إِلَى الْهُدَى ائْتِنَا قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىَ وَأُمِرْنَا لِنُسْلِمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

[94] Qurʾān 39:11-12:
قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُ الدِّينَ
وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

[95] Qurʾān 2:112: (See also Qurʾān 3:20, 4:125.)
بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِندَ رَبِّهِ وَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

[96] Qurʾān 31:22:
وَمَن يُسْلِمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى وَإِلَى اللَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الأُمُورِ

[97] Qurʾān 2:256:
لاَ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىَ لاَ انفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

those who manifest *islām* will never break. It is important to note, however, that individuals certainly can sever this relationship if they cease to strive in the manner described.

Similar to those who manifest *īmān*, those who manifest *islām* are described as recognizing God's power and oneness, and being humble and steadfast:

> *... Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You* (muslim). *Join me with the righteous."*[98]
>
> *Say, 'What is revealed to me is that your God is one God—will you submit to Him* (muslimūn)*?*[99]
>
> *We appointed acts of devotion* (mansak) *for every community, for them to celebrate God's name over the livestock He provided for them. But your God is One, so devote yourselves to Him* (ʾaslimu). *Give good news to the humble whose hearts fill with awe whenever God is mentioned, who endure whatever happens to them with patience* (ṣabirīn)*, who keep up the prayer, who give to others out of Our provision to them.*[100]

Qurʾān 22:34-35 revisits the topic of *manāsik* (rites) that was discussed in relation to lateral religious difference and the concept of *umma*. The *āya* states that God has intentionally appointed these diverse rites, but then it quickly recalls that, despite this divinely-intended lateral difference, there is only one God and that the correct relationship with God is *islām*.

Those who manifest *islām* are also described as fearing and having no doubt about the Hereafter. Certainty and fear are the result of their accurate comprehension of God's true status and power:

> *Say, 'To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth?' Say, 'To God. He has taken it upon Himself to be merciful. He will certainly gather you on the Day of Resurrection, which is beyond all doubt. Those who deceive themselves will not believe. All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' Say, 'Shall I take for myself a protector other than God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds but is not fed?' Say, 'I am commanded to be the first to devote myself*

[98] Qurʾān 12:101 (excerpt): ... فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ أَنتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

[99] Qurʾān 21:108: قُلْ إِنَّمَا يُوحَى إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَهَلْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ

[100] Qurʾān 22:34-35: وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَى مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّن بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ فَإِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَهُمْ وَالْمُقِيمِي الصَّلَاةِ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

[to Him].' Do not be one of the associators (mushrikīn)*. Say, 'I fear* (ʾakhāfu) *the punishment of a dreadful Day if I disobey my Lord.*[101]

It is in light of the preceding description of those who manifest *islām* that other well-known *āyāt* about *islām* should be understood:

Religion, in God's eyes, is devotion to Him alone (islām) *...*[102]

If anyone seeks a religion other than complete devotion to God (islām)*, it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter.*[103]

As argued in Chapter Seven, these *āyāt* cannot be read as referring exclusively to the community of people who follow Muḥammad. They rather refer to those who manifest *ikhlaṣ*, who follow Abraham, who submit their entire selves, who freely grasp the surest handhold, and who fear God's power. Moreover, in light of Qurʾān 22:34-35 and 2:111-112 (discussed in reference to *kufr*), it is even possible to argue that these *āyāt* refer to those who are not distracted by lateral difference, but remain steadfast in the manifestation of *taqwā*.

Nifāq

In reference to the general attitude towards God, the concept of *nifāq* is associated with three dominant characteristics. The first is that those individuals who manifest *nifāq* are described as ignoring and forgetting God:

The hypocrites, both men and women (munāfiqūn *and* munāfiqāt)*, are all the same: they order what is wrong and forbid what is right; they are tight-fisted. They have ignored God, so He has ignored them. The hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *are the disobedient ones.*[104]

---

[101] Qurʾān 6:12-15: قُل لِّمَن مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ قُل لِّلَّهِ كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ لَيَجْمَعَنَّكُمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لاَ رَيْبَ فِيهِ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُواْ أَنفُسَهُمْ فَهُمْ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَلَهُ مَا سَكَنَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ
قُلْ أَغَيْرَ اللّهِ أَتَّخِذُ وَلِيًّا فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَهُوَ يُطْعِمُ وَلاَ يُطْعَمُ قُلْ إِنِّيَ أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَلاَ تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
قُلْ إِنِّيَ أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

[102] Qurʾān 3:19: إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِندَ اللّهِ الإِسْلاَمُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوْتُواْ الْكِتَابَ إِلاَّ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللّهِ فَإِنَّ اللّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

[103] Qurʾān 3:85: وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الإِسْلاَمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

[104] Qurʾān 9:67: الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ بَعْضُهُم مِّن بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمُنكَرِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَقْبِضُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ نَسُواْ اللّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

> *Satan has gained control over them and made them forget God. They are on Satan's side, and Satan's side will be the losers.*[105]

Moreover, similar to those who manifest *kufr*, the flawed relationship in the case of *nifāq* is connected to Satan. The *munafiqūn* are described as being members of the *ḥizb* (faction) of Satan.

The second key characteristic of those who manifest *nifāq* is that they fear people more than God. Whereas it is God who makes the hearts of the *muʾminūn* tremble, the *munāfiqūn* display more fear of the hardships that people may inflict:

> *Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than fear of God because they are people devoid of understanding.*[106]

> *... they think every cry they hear is against them—and they are the enemy. Beware of them. May God confound them! How devious they are!*[107]

> *There are some people who say, 'We believe in God,' but, when they suffer for His cause, they think that human persecution is as severe as God's punishment—yet, if any help comes to you from your Lord, they will say, 'We have always been with you.' Does God not know best what is in everyone's hearts?*[108]

The primary concern of those who manifest *nifāq* is to protect and benefit themselves irrespective of their actions and irrespective of the fact that God knows what is truly in their hearts. Moreover, the fact that they are primarily concerned with their status before humans rather than their status before God is evident in their willingness to oscillate between groups dependent solely upon which group has power or experiences success:

> *They wait to see what happens to you and, if God brings you success, they say, 'Were we not on your side?' but if the disbelievers* (kāfirīn) *have some success, they say to them, 'Did we not have the upper hand over you, and [yet] protect you from the believers* (muʾminīn)*?'...*[109]

---

[105] Qurʾān 58:19: اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُوْلَئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

[106] Qurʾān 59:13: لَأَنتُمْ أَشَدُّ رَهْبَةً فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَّا يَفْقَهُونَ

[107] Qurʾān 63:4 (excerpt): ... مُّسَنَّدَةٌ يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ

[108] Qurʾān 29:10: وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ فَإِذَا أُوذِيَ فِي اللَّهِ جَعَلَ فِتْنَةَ النَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ اللَّهِ وَلَئِن جَاء نَصْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ أَوَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ

[109] Qurʾān 4:141 (excerpt): ... الَّذِينَ يَتَرَبَّصُونَ بِكُمْ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمْ فَتْحٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ قَالُواْ أَلَمْ نَكُن مَّعَكُمْ وَإِن كَانَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نَصِيبٌ قَالُواْ أَلَمْ نَسْتَحْوِذْ عَلَيْكُمْ وَنَمْنَعْكُم مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

A similar description of their fear of other humans and their attempt to negotiate their position is found in Qurʾān 9:64-66:

> *The hypocrites* (munāfiqūn) *fear that a sūra will be revealed exposing what is in their hearts—say, 'Carry on with your jokes: God will bring about what you fear!'—yet if you were to question them, they would be sure to say, 'We were just chatting, just amusing ourselves.' Say, 'Were you making jokes about God, His Revelations, and His Messenger? Do not try to justify yourselves; you have gone from belief* (īmān) *to disbelief* (kafartum)*.' We may forgive some of you, but We will punish others: they are evildoers.*[110]

These *āyāt* also bring two more subtle, yet significant, ideas to the fore. First, if those who manifest *nifāq* fear that a *sūra* will be revealed thus informing people of their true nature, this implies that they acknowledge God's power to some extent. They would not fear the revelation of a *sūra* if they did not ascribe any power or knowledge to God. Those who manifest *nifāq* know that God has power, but they fear and covet human power more. Second, these *āyāt* describe those who manifest *nifāq* as moving from *īmān* to *kufr*. There are other *āyāt* that describe them as being closer to *kufr* than *īmān* in particular circumstances:

> *... On that day they were closer to disbelief* (kufr) *than belief* (īmān)*. They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts: God knows exactly what they conceal.*[111]

These various depictions lead Izutsu to observe astutely that *nifāq* is not a "water-tight compartment" but rather has a "conspicuously dynamic nature, that may extend with elasticity towards either direction to shade off almost imperceptibly into *kufr* or *īmān*."[112] The dynamic nature of *nifāq* is also suggested in a description that is commonly associated with the concept, that is, "sickness in the heart."[113] The analogy of sickness, while not flattering, does

---

[110] Qurʾān 9:64-66:
يَحْذَرُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ أَن تُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُورَةٌ تُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا فِي قُلُوبِهِم قُلِ اسْتَهْزِؤُواْ إِنَّ اللّهَ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا تَحْذَرُونَ
وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّمَا كُنَّا نَخُوضُ وَنَلْعَبُ قُلْ أَبِاللّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ وَرَسُولِهِ كُنتُمْ تَسْتَهْزِؤُونَ
لاَ تَعْتَذِرُواْ قَدْ كَفَرْتُم بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ إِن نَّعْفُ عَن طَآئِفَةٍ مِّنكُمْ نُعَذِّبْ طَآئِفَةً بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُواْ مُجْرِمِينَ

[111] Qurʾān 3:167 (excerpt):
... هُمْ لِلْكُفْرِ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلإِيمَانِ يَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِهِم مَّا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ

[112] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 209.

[113] For example, see Qurʾān 24:50, 5:41, 3:167, 47:20, 2:8-10. There are other *āyāt* (e.g., Qurʾān 8:49, 33:12) that state "the *munāfiqūn* and those with sickness in their hearts," and thus raise some questions about whether this appellation is exclusively applied to those who manifest *nifāq*.

evoke the possibility of positive change, the possibility of regaining 'health.' In fact, this ability is affirmed in Qurʾān 4:145-146, which states that those who manifest *nifāq* can repent, mend their ways, and thereby be joined with those who manifest *īmān:*

> *The hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them. Except those who repent, mend their ways, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to Him: these will be joined with the believers* (muʾminīn)*, and God will give the believers a mighty reward.*[114]

The third central characteristic that those who manifest *nifāq* display in their acknowledgment of God is deception; they fruitlessly attempt to deceive God in the same manner that they strive to deceive other humans:

> *The hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *try to deceive God, but it is He who causes them to be deceived …*[115]
>
> *Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,' when really they do not believe. They seek to deceive God and the believers but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it.*[116]

While these *āyāt* indicate that they are not successful in their endeavor to deceive God, this characteristic must be further unpacked in light of some of the other traits that have already been explored. If those who manifest *nifāq* fear God's revelation of a *sūra*, then they also know that their attempt to deceive God, their attempt to hide what is truly in their hearts, has failed. There is some sort of inconsistency. Not a textual inconsistency, but an inconsistency in behavior. Those who manifest *nifāq* appear similar to compulsive liars; they lie or attempt to deceive even when they know they have been caught. This is pointedly confirmed in the depiction of their comportment on the Day of Resurrection:

---

[114] Qurʾān 4:145-146: إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الدَّرْكِ الأَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا
إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ تَابُواْ وَأَصْلَحُواْ وَاعْتَصَمُواْ بِاللّهِ وَأَخْلَصُواْ دِينَهُمْ لِلّهِ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَسَوْفَ يُؤْتِ اللّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

[115] Qurʾān 4:142 (excerpt): إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ …

[116] Qurʾān 2:8-9: وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللّهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَمَا هُم بِمُؤْمِنِينَ
يُخَادِعُونَ اللّهَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلاَّ أَنفُسَهُم وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

In these *āyāt*, the phrase "when really they do not believe" does not indicate that they do not acknowledge the existence of God, but that they do not manifest *īmān* correctly or sufficiently.

> *On the Day God raises them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear before you now, thinking that it will help them. What liars they are! Satan has gained control over them and made them forget God. They are on Satan's side, and Satan's side will be the losers.*[117]

On that Day—the Day that even those who manifest *kufr* and *shirk* will submit to and acknowledge God—the *munāfiqūn* will stand in the very face of God and attempt to use their worldly tactics to ingratiate themselves with God. This behavior sheds additional light on the analogy of sickness.

3. Response to God's Guidance

Another central aspect of *taqwā* is humankind's response to God's guidance. As noted in Chapter Seven, God's guidance assumes a variety of forms, including a *nafs* and *fiṭra* that know *taqwā*, natural *āyāt* that provoke thought that leads to *taqwā*, and revelation delivered through messengers. What is the connection of each of the concepts to these sources of guidance? Do people who manifest these concepts actualize their *fiṭra*? Do they properly reflect upon natural *āyāt*? Do they accept the revelation sent through messengers?

Īmān

The response of those who manifest *īmān* to God's guidance can be summarized in four primary characteristics. The first characteristic is that they hear and obey revelation:

> *... they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'*[118]

> *When the true believers* (muʾminīn) *are summoned to God and His Messenger in order for him to judge between them, they say, 'We hear and we obey.' These are the ones who will prosper.*[119]

---

[117] Qurʾān 58:19: اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُوْلَئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

[118] Qurʾān 2:285 (excerpt): ... وَقَالُواْ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

This indicates not simply the faculty of hearing, but also the notion of comprehension. Those who manifest *īmān* truly grasp the message that they are sent, and their response in light of that clear comprehension is to obey God, the message and the messenger:

> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū)*, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you. If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day: that is better and fairer in the end.*[120]
>
> *Believers* (alladhīna āmanū)*, obey God and His Messenger: do not turn away when you are listening to him.*[121]

It should be reiterated that the order to obey the message and messenger is not an order that is unique to Muḥammad. As indicated in Chapter Seven, this is a universal order given with each revelation and messenger.[122] However, it does raise an important question: what does such obedience entail, especially in light of the diversity of rites and practices that are sent with each messenger? According to theories of supersession, this question is easily resolved in favor of the chronologically latest revelation—that is, the revelation of Muḥammad—and it is suggested that all obedience is now due to Muḥammad alone. I will return to this question in Chapter Nine, but at this juncture it is enough to acknowledge that obedience is commanded and is part of the manifestation of *īmān*.

The second characteristic of those who manifest *īmān* is that revelation increases their *īmān*:

> *True believers* (muʾminūn) *are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith* (īmān) *increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord.*[123]

---

[119] Qurʾān 24:51: إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَن يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا وَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

[120] Qurʾān 4:59: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ أَطِيعُواْ اللّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ الرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي الأَمْرِ مِنكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلاً

[121] Qurʾān 8:20: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ أَطِيعُواْ اللّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلاَ تَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ وَأَنتُمْ تَسْمَعُونَ

[122] For example, see Qurʾān 26:106-108.

[123] Qurʾān 8:2: إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

> *When a sūra is revealed, some say, 'Have any of you been strengthened in faith* (īmān) *by it?' It certainly does strengthen in faith* (īmān) *those who believe* (alladhīna āmanū) *and they rejoice.*[124]

The preceding *āya* stands in stark contrast with the description of those who manifest *nifāq*. As noted in reference to Qurʾān 9:64-66, those who manifest *nifāq* fear the revelation of a *sūra* because of the impact it may have on their social position. Here, however, the conviction of those who manifest *īmān* is only strengthened through revelation. Once again, it is vital to note that the fact that *īmān* can be strengthened or increased indicates that there are diverse levels and degrees of *īmān*, and that *īmān* is dynamic. Moreover, if *īmān* is something that can increase, it would appear that it would also have to be something that can decrease.

Humility in response to revelation is the third trait that defines those who manifest *īmān*:

> *Say, 'Whether you believe it or not, those who were given knowledge earlier fall down on their faces when it is recited to them, and say, "Glory to our Lord! Our Lord's promise has been fulfilled." They fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility* (khushūʿ)*.'*[125]

> *Some of the People of the Scripture believe* (yuʾmin) *in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves* (khāshiʿīn) *before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price* (thamanan qalīlan)*. These people will have their rewards with their Lord: God is swift in reckoning.*[126]

> *The only people who truly believe* (yuʾminu) *in Our messages are those who, when they are reminded of them, bow down in worship, celebrate their Lord's praises, and do not think themselves above this* (lā yastakbirūn)*.*[127]

In these *āyāt* those who manifest *īmān* are described as humbling themselves, even assuming the posture of prostration in response to the revelation of God. Also, like the previous *āyāt* about *īmān* being increased, these indicate that humility as well can be increased. This results

---

[124] Qurʾān 9:124: وَإِذَا مَا أُنزِلَتْ سُورَةٌ فَمِنْهُم مَّن يَقُولُ أَيُّكُمْ زَادَتْهُ هَـذِهِ إِيمَانًا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ فَزَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَهُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ

[125] Qurʾān 17:108-109: وَيَقُولُونَ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِن كَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّنَا لَمَفْعُولاً
وَيَخِرُّونَ لِلأَذْقَانِ يَبْكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعًا

[126] Qurʾān 3:199:
وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَن يُؤْمِنُ بِاللّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلّهِ لاَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلاً أُوْلَـئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

[127] Qurʾān 32:15: إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهَا خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

in the same implications; humility is dynamic, has degrees, and can fluctuate. Qurʾān 3:199 juxtaposes the humility of those who manifest *īmān* with the notion of selling God's revelation *thamanan qalīlan* (for a small price). This is a reference to the response of those who manifest *kufr*, and I will discuss its meaning in greater detail in that section. Qurʾān 32:15 states that those who manifest *īmān* are willing to humble themselves in prostration because they do not think they are above doing so, *lā yastakbirūn*. Significantly, what those who manifest *īmān* lack is exactly what Iblis displays. As seen in Qurʾān 7:13, Iblis, in response to God's guidance, was *takabbara* (was arrogant),[128] and thus refused to obey God.

Notably, the characteristic of humility in response to God is also attributed to nature:

> *If We had sent this Qurʾān down to a mountain, you [Prophet] would have seen it humbled* (khāshiʿa) *and split apart in its awe of God: We offer people such illustrations so that they may reflect.*[129]
>
> *Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate* (khāshiʿa)*, but when We send water down on to it, it stirs and grows …*[130]

The first *āya* states that a mountain would respond to the Qurʾān in a manner similar to those who manifest *īmān*; the mountain would be humbled and awed. This establishes a connection between the freely chosen behavior of people and the natural behavior of other aspects of God's creation. In other words, the behavior of those who manifest *īmān* is depicted as a natural response. While the concept of *fiṭra* is not invoked in this *āya*, it is possible to draw a connection between this analogy the depiction of *fiṭra* as being oriented towards God. Qurʾān 41:39 states that God's blessings are sent in the form of water to the humble earth, which then responds and grows. This natural analogy is a parallel of the response of those who manifest

[128] *Takabbara* and *yastakbirūn* both come from the root K-B-R, and they mean virtually the same thing.
[129] Qurʾān 59:21: لَوْ أَنزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ
[130] Qurʾān 41:39 (excerpt): وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنَّكَ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ خَاشِعَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاء اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ …

īmān to God's revelation. They are humble, and when God sends revelation that revelation stirs them to respond and causes them to grow in faith.

The final characteristic of those who manifest *īmān* is that they do not draw distinctions among God's revelations or messengers:

> *The Messenger believes* (āmana) *in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful* (muʾminūn)*. They all believe* (āmana) *in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between* (lā nufarriqu) *any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'*[131]

A similar assertion is made in Qurʾān 3:199 (cited previously) in reference to the People of the Scripture who believe in "what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them." However, Qurʾān 2:285 not only details the type of behavior those who manifest *īmān* avoid, it also states the type of behavior they display. Those who manifest *īmān* do not make distinctions among revelations and messengers. On the contrary, they hear and obey.

Shirk

As already indicated in the discussion of their recognition of God, those who manifest *shirk* fail to comprehend the true nature of God's power. This failure in comprehension is also evident in their response to God's guidance. To begin with, they do not reflect upon natural *āyāt* in a manner that produces pure belief. Although God has provided a multitude of natural signs that attest to God's stature, those who manifest *shirk* fail to use their reason (*ʿaql*) to understand the implications of these signs:

> *In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky*

[131] Qurʾān 2:285: آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلآئِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لاَ نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ وَقَالُواْ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

> *and earth: there are signs in all these for those who use their reason* (yaʿqilūn)*. Even so, there are some who choose to take others as rivals to God …*[132]

They also fail to use reason to reflect on the inconsistencies of their practices. *Sūrat al-ʾanbiyāʾ* 21:51-67 recounts the story of Abraham and the idols of his people. Abraham breaks all of the idols except the largest one. When his people find the idols in this state and inquire as to what transpired, Abraham tells them that they should question the largest idol. Abraham knows that the idol is incapable of responding:

> *He said, 'No, it was done by the biggest of them—this one. Ask them, if they can talk.' They turned to one another, saying, 'It is you who are in the wrong,' but then they lapsed again and said, 'You know very well these gods cannot speak.' Abraham said, 'How can you worship what can neither benefit nor harm you, instead of God? Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Will you not use your reason* (taʿqilūn)*?*[133]

When forced into a logical corner, however, Abraham's people readily admit that the idols cannot speak. They are aware of their lack of power, but this awareness does not change their devotion to those idols. Therefore, their beliefs and practices are not based upon the natural capacity for reason nor upon consideration of God's natural *āyāt*. Other Qurʾānic *āyāt* confirm this, when they critique those who manifest *shirk* for inventing beliefs and practices without any firm basis, that is, without any connection to God's guidance:

> *Consider al-Lat and al-ʿUzza, and the third one, Manat—are you to have the male and He the female? That would be a most unjust distribution! These are nothing but names you have invented yourselves, you and your forefathers. God has sent no authority for them. These people merely follow conjecture* (ẓann) *and the whims of their souls, even though guidance has come to them from their Lord.*[134]

---

[132] Qurʾān 2:164-165 (excerpt):
إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلاَفِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاء مِن مَّاء فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ دَآبَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاء وَالأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللّهِ أَندَاداً …

[133] Qurʾān 21:63-67: قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ هَذَا فَاسْأَلُوهُمْ إِن كَانُوا يَنطِقُونَ فَرَجَعُوا إِلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ
ثُمَّ نُكِسُوا عَلَى رُؤُوسِهِمْ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا هَؤُلاء يَنطِقُونَ قَالَ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ أُفٍّ لَّكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

[134] Qurʾān 53:19-23: (See also Qurʾān 6:148) أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللاَّتَ وَالْعُزَّى وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الأُخْرَى أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الأُنثَى تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَى
إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاء سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُم مَّا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَانٍ إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الأَنفُسُ وَلَقَدْ جَاءهُم مِّن رَّبِّهِمُ الْهُدَى

As Izutsu indicates, the concept of *ẓann* denotes "a groundless, unwarranted type of thinking, uncertain or doubtful knowledge, unreliable opinion, or mere conjecture."[135] This type of baseless knowledge is contrasted in the Qurʾān with *ʿilm*, which is sound knowledge derived from God's guidance.

Those who manifest *shirk* are also described as following what their ancestors or forefathers followed in lieu of following God's guidance:

> *They found their forefathers astray, and rushed to follow in their footsteps—before them most men in the past went astray, even though We sent messengers to warn them.*[136]
>
> *No indeed! They say, 'We saw our fathers following this tradition; we are guided by their footsteps.'*[137]

They persist in their allegiance to their inherited ways, regardless of whether or not divine guidance differs from those ways. As discussed in the preceding section, Qurʾān 7:172 depicts all individuals as testifying at the moment of creation to the existence and status of God. In reference to those who manifest *shirk*, the *āya* which directly follows 7:172 assumes great consequence as well:

> *When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,' or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?'*[138]

The children of Adam are made to testify for two reasons: so that they cannot claim ignorance of God and so that they cannot claim blind adherence to the ways of their forefathers. As is blatantly evident in example of Abraham, the ideal is for someone to follow what is right and

---

[135] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 151.

[136] Qurʾān 37:69-72: إِنَّهُمْ أَلْفَوْا آبَاءهُمْ ضَالِّينَ فَهُمْ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ يُهْرَعُونَ وَلَقَدْ ضَلَّ قَبْلَهُمْ أَكْثَرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِم مُّنذِرِينَ

[137] Qurʾān 43:22: بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءنَا عَلَى أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَى آثَارِهِم مُّهْتَدُونَ

[138] Qurʾān 7:172-173: وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُواْ بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُواْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ أَوْ تَقُولُواْ إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِّن بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

clear irrespective of the practices in which they find themselves situated. The Qurʾān's optimism about such a possibility is directly connected to the depiction of the *fiṭra* as inclining towards God and being created to distinguish between rebellion and *taqwā*.

The Qurʾān also states that those who manifest *shirk* do not accept the message of revelation because it is delivered by a mere human being:

> *... But they said, 'You are only men like us. You want to turn us away from what our forefathers used to worship. Bring us clear proof then.'*[139]

> *The disbelievers* (kāfirūn) *think it strange that a prophet of their own people has come to warn them: they say, 'He is just a lying sorcerer. How can he claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing!'*[140]

> *The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, 'How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?'*[141]

They refuse to accept that God would choose a human being to deliver divine revelation. Instead, they cling to the ways of their forefathers and demand miracles and other forms of proof. For them, the message is not sufficient proof in and of itself. This contrasts with those who manifest *īmān*, those who become humble upon hearing the revelation. These *āyāt* also reveal another area of overlap between *shirk* and *kufr*; Qurʾān 38:4-5 describes those who manifest *kufr* as associating partners with God.

Ḥanīf

As seen in the section on the recognition of God, the concept of *ḥanīf* is associated with *ikhlaṣ*, *fiṭra*, and Abraham. The same themes recur in reference to God's guidance. The Qurʾān indicates that *ikhlaṣ* can be provoked by both natural *āyāt* and revelation:

---

[139] Qurʾān 14:10 (excerpt): ... قَالُواْ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا تُرِيدُونَ أَن تَصُدُّونَا عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَآؤُنَا فَأْتُونَا بِسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ

[140] Qurʾān 38:4-5: وَعَجِبُوا أَن جَاءهُم مُّنذِرٌ مِّنْهُمْ وَقَالَ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا سَاحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ أَجَعَلَ الْآلِهَةَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عُجَابٌ

[141] Qurʾān 17:94: وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَن يُؤْمِنُواْ إِذْ جَاءهُمُ الْهُدَى إِلاَّ أَن قَالُواْ أَبَعَثَ اللّهُ بَشَرًا رَّسُولاً

> *It is He who shows you His signs* (āyāt) *and sends water down from the sky to sustain you, though only those who turn to God will take heed. So call upon God and dedicate your religion to Him alone* (mukhliṣīn)*, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers* (kāfirūn)*.*[142]
>
> *It is We who sent down the Scripture to you with the Truth, so worship God with your total devotion* (mukhliṣ)*.*[143]

Additionally, as discussed in relation to Qurʾān 30:30, the concept of *ḥanīf* is closely associated with the *fiṭra*. To be a *ḥanīf* is to behave in line with the natural orientation of *fiṭra*. Additional light can be shed on the meaning of this natural orientation through examination of another Qurʾānic account of Abraham. *Sūrat al-ʾanʿām* describes the process whereby Abraham arrived at a negative evaluation of the *shirk* of his people and certainty regarding God's singular status:

> *In this way We showed Abraham [God's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be among those who arrive at certainty* (mūqinīn)*. When the night grew dark over him he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord,' but when it set, he said, 'I do not like things that set.' And when he saw the moon rising he said, 'This is my Lord,' but when it too set, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be one of those who go astray.' Then he saw the sun rising and cried, 'This is my Lord! This is greater.' But when the sun set, he said, 'My people, I disown all that you worship beside God* (tushrikūna)*. I have turned my face* (wajjahtu wajhiya) *as a true believer* (ḥanīf) *towards Him who created the heavens and the earth. I am not one of the associators* (mushrikīn)*.'*[144]

Abraham is awed by the natural *āyāt*.[145] This is, after all, the purpose of natural *āyāt*; they are created to stir wonder in human beings. Where Abraham as *ḥanīf* differs from those who manifest *shirk* is that he does not stop at the stage of awe. He probes deeper, examining the behavior of these *āyāt*. This probing leads him to the observation that each of these things eventually 'sets'; each of the natural *āyāt* appears great and overwhelming, yet that stature is

---

[142] Qurʾān 40:13-14: هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُ لَكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ رِزْقًا وَمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ إِلَّا مَن يُنِيبُ فَادْعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

[143] Qurʾān 39:2: إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُ الدِّينَ

[144] Qurʾān 6:75-79: وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَـذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لا أُحِبُّ الآفِلِينَ
فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَازِغًا قَالَ هَـذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ
فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَازِغَةً قَالَ هَـذَا رَبِّي هَـذَآ أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ
إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَاْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

[145] See also Reynolds, *The Qurʾān,* 71-75.

transient. Thus, Abraham concludes that such things are not worthy of worship. What is worthy of worship, however, is the Creator of those *āyāt*. The conclusion at which Abraham arrives through inductive reasoning is confirmed in Qurʾān 41:37:

> *The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His signs* (āyāt). *Do not bow down in worship to the sun or the moon, but bow down to God who created them, if it is truly Him that you worship.*[146]

In reference to this account of Abraham, it is also important to acknowledge that through this type of reflection Abraham arrives at *yaqīn* (certainty). Therefore, revelation in the strict sense cannot be the only means of arriving at certainty about God and God's will.

Occasionally, the term of *ḥanīf* has been understood to denote someone who has never been exposed to revelation.[147] In this depiction, the *ḥanīf* is one who has arrived at an understanding of God through *fiṭra* alone. While the preceding account of Abraham achieving *yaqīn* indicates the possibility of such, it is challenging to support this depiction. First of all, as discussed in Chapter Seven, revelation is understood to be universal. Second, the Qurʾān depicts Abraham as responding to God's order to submit,[148] and refers to the *ṣuḥuf* (scriptures, literally 'sheets') of Abraham and Moses.[149] Moreover, Muḥammad is instructed in the Qurʾān—that is, through revelation—to follow the way of Abraham the *ḥanīf*;

> *Then We revealed to you [Muḥammad], 'Follow the creed of Abraham, as a man of pure faith* (ḥanīf) *who was not one of the associators* (mushrikīn)*.'*[150]

The attempt to depict the *ḥanīf* as someone with no experience of revelation appears to be an attempt to limit its applicability and present it as an exception rather than the norm. The norm, of course, would be explicit alignment with the revelation of Muḥammad. Only those

---

[146] Qurʾān 41:37: وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

[147] For example, see al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 141.

[148] See Qurʾān 2:131.

[149] See Qurʾān 87:19.

[150] Qurʾān 16:123: ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنِ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

who were never exposed to revelation would be exempted from this obligation. However, this does not appear to be the Qurʾānic position at all. Not only is Abraham connected with revelation, but Abraham the *ḥanīf* is presented as the ideal. *Ḥanīf* is the ideal in part due to its distinction from *shirk*, but *ḥanīf* is also presented as the ideal in relation to other communities of revelation:

> *People of the Scripture, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand* (taʿqilūn)*? You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge* (ʿilm)*, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Nazarene. He was upright and devoted to God* (ḥanīfan musliman)*, never of the associators* (mushrikīn)*, and the people who are closest to him are those who truly follow his ways, this Prophet, and believers—God is close to the believers.*[151]

These *āyāt* state that although Abraham preceded both the Jews and the Nazarenes, both communities nevertheless attempt to claim Abraham as their own. However, the mere claiming of affiliation is not the point of contention in these *āyāt*. The Qurʾān, rather, is critiquing their attempt to lay exclusive claim to Abraham. Significantly, the ideal way of Abraham is placed in direct contrast with such divisive behavior:

> *So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion* (ʾaqīm wajhaka lil-dīn ḥanīfan)*. This is the natural disposition* (fiṭra) *God instilled in mankind—there is no altering God's creation—and this is the right religion* (al-dīn al-qayyim)*, though most people do not realize it. Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful of Him; keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe partners to God* (mushrikīn)*, those who divide* (farraqū) *their religion and become sects* (shiyaʿ) with each *faction* (ḥizb) *rejoicing in what they have.*[152]

The use here of the verb *farraqū* recalls the description of those who manifest *īmān*; they do not make distinctions (*lā tafarriqu*). Moreover, the attempt to make exclusive and divisive claims is

[151] Qurʾān 3:65-68:
يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَاةُ وَالإِنجِيلُ إِلاَّ مِن بَعْدِهِ أَفَلاَ تَعْقِلُونَ
هَاأَنتُمْ هَؤُلاء حَاجَجْتُمْ فِيمَا لَكُم بِهِ عِلمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُم بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَاللّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لاَ تَعْلَمُونَ
مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلاَ نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِن كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُّسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَـذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَاللّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

[152] Qurʾān 30:30-32:
فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيَعًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

one of the behaviors of those who manifest *kufr*; as we have seen, they make exclusive claims to the Hereafter. Based on this, it is possible to define *ḥanīf* as one who understands God through the *fiṭra*, through the *āyāt* of nature and revelation, who does not associate any partners with God, and who does not divide the religion into factions (*shīʿa*, *ḥizb*) based upon exclusive claims.

Kufr

Many of the Qur'ānic references to the concept of *kufr* are related to those people who had previously been granted revelation. As such, the majority of the critiques of those who manifest *kufr* relate to their treatment of those revelations and to their receptivity to the revelation to Muḥammad. The People of the Scripture in general are reminded to hold fast to their own revelation:

> *Say, 'People of the Scripture, you have no true basis [for your religion] unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and that which has been sent down to you from your Lord,' but what has been sent down to you [Prophet] from your Lord is sure to increase many of them in their insolence and defiance: do not worry about those who defy [God].*[153]

This reminder should be compared to the critiques of those who manifest *shirk*, those who do not have any basis for their religion, but only follow their own suppositions and the ways of their forefathers. The reminder issued here differs. The People of the Scripture have a sound basis for their beliefs and practices, yet some of them fail to uphold that revelation.

The failure to uphold the revelation assumes a variety of forms. Similar to the concept of *kufr* in relation to the other themes, it is vital not to lump these forms together, thus obscuring their nuances. The first manner in which those who manifest *kufr* fail to uphold the

[153] Qur'ān 5:68:
قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَى شَيْءٍ حَتَّىَ تُقِيمُواْ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالإِنجِيلَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُم مَّا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا فَلاَ تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

revelation is through concealment. Those who previously received revelation swore to share the revelation with others, yet some failed to do so:

> *God took a pledge from those who were given the Scripture—'Make it known to people; do not conceal it'—but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders, they bartered it for a small price* (thamanan qalīlan)*: what a bad bargain they made!*[154]

The second manner in which those who manifest *kufr* fail to uphold the revelation is through invention and ascription. They fabricate ideas, practices and beliefs and then claim that they are part of the revelation:

> *So woe to those who write something down with their own hands and then claim, 'This is from God,' in order to make some small gain. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for all that they have earned!*[155]

The third way in which they fail to uphold revelation is through distortion. They attribute different meanings to the words or change the words all together:

> *Some Jews distort words from their contexts: they say, 'We hear and disobey,' and 'Listen,' [adding the insult] 'May you not hear,' and 'Raʿina [Look after us],' twisting it abusively with their tongues [to make it sound like 'you fool' or 'you evil one'] so as to disparage religion. If they had said, 'We hear and obey,'...*[156]

The nature of the specific distortion depicted in this *āya* is especially significant in reference to the description of those who manifest *īmān*, those who respond to revelation by saying "we hear and we obey." In contrast, those who manifest *kufr* hear but do not obey. As already stated, to "hear" implies comprehension and understanding not the mere faculty of hearing. Thus, those who manifest *kufr* do not lack an understanding of the revelation, but rather they fail to behave in line with the revelation. Izutsu confirms this when he depicts the essence of *kufr* as the fact that "man denies ... the blessing of God, although he recognizes it clearly."[157]

---

[154] Qurʾān 3:187: وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلاَ تَكْتُمُونَهُ فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَاء ظُهُورِهِمْ وَاشْتَرَوْاْ بِهِ ثَمَناً قَلِيلاً فَبِئْسَ مَا يَشْتَرُونَ

[155] Qurʾān 2:79: فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَـذَا مِنْ عِندِ اللهِ لِيَشْتَرُواْ بِهِ ثَمَناً قَلِيلاً فَوَيْلٌ لَّهُم مِّمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَّهُمْ مِّمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ

[156] Qurʾān 4:46 (excerpt): مِّنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُواْ يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَاسْمَعْ غَيْرَ مُسْمَعٍ وَرَاعِنَا لَيًّا بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ وَطَعْنًا فِي الدِّينِ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ قَالُواْ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ...
See also Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary,* 371-372.

[157] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 139.

In fact, all three ways in which those who manifest *kufr* fail to uphold revelation share a common trait. They are all based on recognition of the authority of revelation. In fact, they are all various attempts to co-opt that authority. This presents another interesting distinction from those who manifest *shirk*. Those who manifest *shirk* have a flawed conception of God; they acknowledge God's power in some respects, but not in all. They do not understand the natural *āyāt* in an appropriate manner, and when confronted with revelation through a messenger, they do not accept it because the messenger is only a mortal. Those who manifest *kufr,* however, do recognize the truth.[158] They know the revelation, and they know the messenger is a messenger, yet they still engage in *kufr*:[159]

> *People of the Scripture, why do you deny* (takfurūna) *God's signs when you yourselves witness them? People of the Scripture, why do you cover up truth with falsehood? Why do you hide the truth when you recognize it?*[160]
>
> *Those to whom We have given the Scripture know this as well as they know their own sons. Those who have lost their souls will not believe.*[161]

The Qurʾān also provides a specific explanation for their refusal to acknowledge the revelation of Muḥammad:

> *... [they say], 'Do not believe that anyone else could be given a revelation similar to what you were given, or that they could use it to argue against you in your Lord's presence.' Tell them, 'All grace is in God's hands: He grants it to whoever He will—He is all embracing, all knowing.*[162]
>
> *Do they envy people for the bounty God has granted them? We gave the descendants of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom—and We gave them a great kingdom.*[163]

---

[158] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.

[159] In light of the distinction between hierarchical and lateral religious difference, it is important to read these *āyāt* as referring to only some of the People of the Scripture.

[160] Qurʾān 3:70-71: يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللهِ وَأَنتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

[161] Qurʾān 6:25:
وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَسْتَمِعُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَن يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا وَإِن يَرَوْاْ كُلَّ آيَةٍ لاَّ يُؤْمِنُواْ بِهَا حَتَّى إِذَا جَآؤُوكَ يُجَادِلُونَكَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ إِنْ هَذَآ إِلاَّ أَسَاطِيرُ الأَوَّلِينَ

[162] Qurʾān 3:73 (excerpt): (See also Qurʾān 2:105.)
... أَن يُؤْتَى أَحَدٌ مِّثْلَ مَا أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَآجُّوكُمْ عِندَ رَبِّكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَاء وَاللهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

[163] Qurʾān 4:54: أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللهُ مِن فَضْلِهِ فَقَدْ آتَيْنَآ آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَآتَيْنَاهُم مُّلْكًا عَظِيمًا

In line with the story of Iblis, those who manifest *kufr* display a sense of privilege based on lateral difference. This sense of privilege leads them to deny and envy other revelations. They deny other revelations explicitly, yet recognize and envy them implicitly. In other words, this sense of privilege—as seen in reference to the Hereafter—leads them to make exclusive claims. As a result, they are placed in contrast with those who manifest *īmān*, those who do not make distinctions and do not sell the revelation for the small price of falsely exulting their own lateral group:

> *As for those who deny* (yakfurūna) *God and His messengers and want to make a distinction between* (tufarriqū) *them, saying, 'We believe in some but not in others,' seeking a middle way, they are really disbelievers* (kāfirūn)*: We have prepared a humiliating punishment for those who disbelieve* (kāfirīn)*. But God will give [due] rewards to those who believe* (alladhīna āmanū) *in Him and His messengers and make no distinction between* (lam tufarriqū) *any of them. God is most forgiving and merciful.*[164]

Islām

The concept of *islām* is connected to the *fiṭra* through its relationship with the concept of *ḥanīf*. I will not revisit these connections, since they have already been explored in reference to *ḥanīf*.

The Qurʾān also depicts *islām* as the appropriate response to the evidence of God's existence that is evident in natural *āyāt*:

> *Say, 'Since clear evidence* (bayyināt) *has come to me from my Lord I am forbidden to serve those you call upon besides God: I am commanded to submit* (ʾaslima) *to the Lord of the Worlds.' It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of fluid, then from a tiny, clinging form, then He brought you forth as infants, then He allowed you to reach*

[164] Qurʾān 4:150-152: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يُفَرِّقُواْ بَيْنَ اللهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَّخِذُواْ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلاً
أُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُواْ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ أُوْلَـئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَكَانَ اللهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

> *maturity, then He let you grow old—though some of you die sooner—and reach your appointed term so that you might use your reason* (taʿqilūn).[165]

The reference to reason in these *āyāt* reiterates the connection between the concept of *islām* and the concepts of *fiṭra* and *ḥanīf*. The manifestation of *islām*, however, is not only associated with *fiṭra* and natural *āyāt*; it is also closely tied to revelation. *Sūrat al-baqara* describes Abraham's interaction with God. God commands Abraham to surrender himself in devotion:

> *His Lord said to him, 'Devote yourself to Me* (ʾaslim)*.' Abraham replied, 'I devote myself* (ʾaslamtu) *to the Lord of the Universe.' and commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob: 'My sons, God has chosen [your] religion for you, so make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment.' Were you there to see when death came upon Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' they replied, 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, one single God: we devote ourselves to Him.'*[166]

Abraham responds obediently to God's command, enjoining his descendants to do the same. This obedience is similar to that displayed by those who manifest *īmān*. As this *āya* also indicates, the expression of *islām* is not unique to Abraham. In fact, all prophets and messengers are depicted as being individuals who manifest *islām*. Furthermore, those who respond to God's revelations—the previous ones and that given through Muḥammad—have always been *muslimūn*:

> *... God has called you those who are devoted to God* (muslimīn) *both in the past and in this [message] ...*[167]

> *Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it* (muʾminūn) *and, when it is recited to them, they say, 'We believe in it* (āmannā)*, it is the truth from our Lord. Before it came we had already devoted ourselves to Him* (muslimīn)*.*[168]

---

[165] Qurʾān 40:66-67: قُلْ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ لَمَّا جَاءنِيَ الْبَيِّنَاتُ مِن رَبِّي وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُسْلِمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِتَكُونُوا شُيُوخًا وَمِنكُم مَّن يُتَوَفَّى مِن قَبْلُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا أَجَلًا مُّسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

[166] Qurʾān 2:131-133: إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
وَوَصَّى بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلاَ تَمُوتُنَّ إِلاَّ وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ
أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَاء إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي قَالُواْ نَعْبُدُ إِلَـهَكَ وَإِلَـهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَقَ إِلَـهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

[167] Qurʾān 22:78 (excerpt): ... هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِن قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ ...

[168] Qurʾān 28:52-53: الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِهِ هُم بِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَإِذَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا مِن قَبْلِهِ مُسْلِمِينَ

These two *āyāt* underscore the fact that the concept of *islām* is not aligned automatically with Islam, that is, the historical community of Muḥammad. The concept of *islām* is rather a thread that weaves together all messengers and all communities of revelation. This is evident in Qurʾān 2:135-136, which issues a response to another exclusive and proprietary claim of those who manifest *kufr* among the Jews and the Nazarenes:

> *They say, 'Become Jews or Nazarenes, and you will be rightly guided.' Say, 'No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, who was upright* (ḥanīf)*, who was not among those who worship any god besides God* (mushrikīn)*.' So, say, 'We believe* (āmannā) *in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between* (lā nufarriqū) *any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him* (muslimūn)*.'*[169]

Similar to the concept of *īmān* in reference to Qurʾān 2:285, these *āyāt* place divisive and exclusive claims based on lateral difference in direct contrast to the concept of *islām*, which emphasizes unity amidst difference.

Those who manifest *kufr* and those who manifest *islām* are further contrasted in light of the manner in which they approach each other. Those who manifest *kufr* display arrogance, envy and rivalry. They also claim a special status in relationship to God, emphasizing the particularities of their lateral group. In contrast, those who manifest *islām* call others to acknowledge commonalities related to hierarchical difference, to *taqwā*:

> *Argue only in the best way with the People of the Scripture, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe* (āmannā) *in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him* (muslimūn)*.'*[170]

[169] Qurʾān 2:135-136: وَقَالُواْ كُونُواْ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُواْ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ قُولُواْ آمَنَّا بِاللّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لاَ نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

[170] Qurʾān 29:46: وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

> *Say, 'People of the Scripture, come to an equitable word between us and you: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner* (lā nushrika) *to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him* (muslimūn)*.'*[171]

NIFĀQ

In the section on recognition of God, I discussed how those who manifest *nifāq* fear revelation because it could compromise their position in relation to other humans;[172] it could reveal their true nature and true beliefs, thus making them unable to seek benefits from multiple groups.

Other *āyāt* describe those who manifest *nifāq* as claiming to believe in the revelation. This claim, however, is deemed insincere since they are not willing to be judged in accordance with the revelation. Rather, they prefer to be judged by those who are unjust but proffer a potential—and undeserved—benefit:

> *Do you not see those who claim to believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what was sent down before you, yet still want to turn to unjust tyrants for judgment, although they have been ordered to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray. When they are told, 'Turn to God's revelations and the Messenger [for judgment],' you see the hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *turn right away from you.*[173]

The response to God's guidance on the part of those who manifest *nifāq* is also compared to the response of those who manifest *īmān*:

> *When a sūra is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, 'Have any of you been strengthened in faith* (īmān) *by it?' It certainly does strengthen the faith* (īmān) *of those who believe* (alladhīna āmanū) *and they rejoice, but as for those with disease in their hearts, each new sūra adds further to their perversity. They die disbelieving* (kāfirūn)*. Can they not see that they are afflicted once or twice a year? Yet they neither repent nor take heed. Whenever a sūra is revealed, they look at each other and say, 'Is anyone watching you?'*

---

[171] Qurʾān 3:64:
قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْاْ إِلَى كَلَمَةٍ سَوَاء بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلاَّ نَعْبُدَ إِلاَّ اللّهَ وَلاَ نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلاَ يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضاً أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْاْ فَقُولُواْ اشْهَدُواْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

[172] See Qurʾān 9:64-66.

[173] Qurʾān 4:60-61:
أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمْ آمَنُواْ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَحَاكَمُواْ إِلَى الطَّاغُوتِ وَقَدْ أُمِرُواْ أَن يَكْفُرُواْ بِهِ وَيُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَن يُضِلَّهُمْ ضَلاَلاً بَعِيدًا
وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْاْ إِلَى مَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ رَأَيْتَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنكَ صُدُودًا

> *and then they turn away—God has turned their hearts away because they are people who do not use their reason.*[174]

Unlike those whose *īmān* is strengthened through revelation, those who manifest *nifāq* grow in perversity. They even express wonder at the possibility that revelation could increase *īmān*. Moreover, they demonstrate no desire to claim revelation. As in Qurʾān 4:60, they will claim to believe if it benefits them, but they do not display the same proprietary concern as those who manifest *kufr*. Their concern is not to claim special or exclusive status in respect to God; their primary and perpetual concern is claiming status with respect to other humans. As a result, they are equally amenable to claiming status through hollow affirmations of belief or through denial of belief:

> *When they meet the believers* (alladhīna āmanū)*, they say, 'We believe,' but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, 'We're really with you; we were only mocking."*[175]

4. Type and Nature of Actions

Taqwā is not only related to belief in the general sense of the term. *Taqwā* is also about actions, actions in relation to God and actions in relation to other humans. In particular, *taqwā* is associated with prayer, giving charity, performing good deed, and kindness to social and familial relations. Furthermore, *taqwā* is described as something that must be actively pursued and sustained, and as something which can be increased. Therefore, there is great emphasis placed on constancy and perseverance in the required actions. Do individuals who manifest the hierarchal characteristics perform the actions associated with *taqwā*? How do they perform them? Do they do so in a constant manner? What is their motivation?

---

[174] Qurʾān 9:124-127:

وَإِذَا مَا أُنزِلَتْ سُورَةٌ فَمِنْهُم مَّن يَقُولُ أَيُّكُمْ زَادَتْهُ هَـذِهِ إِيمَانًا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ فَزَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَهُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ
وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَتْهُمْ رِجْسًا إِلَى رِجْسِهِمْ وَمَاتُواْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ
أَوَلاَ يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُمْ يُفْتَنُونَ فِي كُلِّ عَامٍ مَّرَّةً أَوْ مَرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ لاَ يَتُوبُونَ وَلاَ هُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ
وَإِذَا مَا أُنزِلَتْ سُورَةٌ نَّظَرَ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ هَلْ يَرَاكُم مِّنْ أَحَدٍ ثُمَّ انصَرَفُواْ صَرَفَ اللّهُ قُلُوبَهُم بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لاَّ يَفْقَهُون

[175] Qurʾān 2:14:

قَالُواْ لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذًا لَّخَاسِرُونَ

The actions of those who manifest *īmān* essentially parallel the actions associated with *taqwā*. They are described as praying, paying alms, being chaste and fulfilling their pledges:

> *Prosperous are the believers* (muʾminūn)*! Those who pray humbly* (khāshiʿūn)*, who shun idle talk, who pay the prescribed alms, who guard their chastity except with their spouses, those whom they rightfully possess—with these they are not to blame, but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits—who are faithful to their trusts and pledges and who keep up their prayers, will rightly be given Paradise as their own, there to remain.*[176]

The actions of those who manifest *īmān* are also frequently depicted in the more general expression "those who believe and do good works (*ṣālihāt*)."[177] This pairing, however, should not lead to the erroneous conclusion that *īmān* is something separate from actions. As Qurʾān 23:1-11 highlights, they are people who manifest *īmān* because they engage in those actions; the actions are an integral part of *īmān*. In other *āyāt*, those who manifest *īmān* are portrayed as 'ordering what is right and forbidding what is wrong:'

> *The believers, both men and women,* (muʾminūn *and* muʾmināt) *support each other; they order what is right* (maʿrūf) *and forbid what is wrong; they keep up* (yuqīmūna) *the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people: God is almighty and wise.*[178]

The manner in which these actions are performed is also noteworthy. Those who manifest *īmān* perform actions with humility and constancy. As with the concepts of *ḥanīf* and *islām*, constancy is indicated in the verb *yuqīmūna*. Those who manifest *īmān* engage in these actions on a routine basis; they establish a pattern of performing these actions. Moreover, they also

---

[176] Qurʾān 23:1-11: قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ إِلَّا عَلَى أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ فَمَنِ ابْتَغَى وَرَاء ذَلِكَ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ أُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

[177] For example, see Qurʾān 29:58.

[178] Qurʾān 9:71: وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاء بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُوْلَـئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللّهُ إِنَّ اللّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

manifest perseverance (*ṣabr*), that is, they struggle to maintain the constancy of their actions even in difficulties:[179]

> *Seek help with steadfastness* (ṣabr) *and prayer—though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble* (khāshiʿīn)*, who know that they will meet their Lord and that it is to Him they will return.*[180]

While this facet of those who manifest *īmān* was previously discussed, this particular *āya* provides a striking example of the interlacing of specific actions with the specific dispositions that characterize the concept of *īmān*. Those who manifest *īmān* do not simply profess belief, they demonstrate constancy and perform specific actions.

Returning to Qurʾān 9:71, those who manifest *īmān* are described as helping and supporting one another. This support is connected to their active enjoining of what is right and forbidding of what is wrong. While they support and help each other, they do not privilege *any* horizontal (human to human) relationship over the vertical relationship with God:

> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū) *do not take your fathers and brothers as allies if they prefer disbelief* (kufr) *to faith* (īmān)*: those of you who do so are doing wrong.*[181]

To take allies from their families if they prefer *kufr* would be to prioritize social relationships over the relationship with God, to seek some sort of benefit from people rather than God:

> *Do those who ally themselves with the disbelievers* (kāfirīn) *rather than the believers* (muʾminīn) *seek power through them? In reality all power is God's to give.*[182]

Moreover, those *āyāt* that advise against taking allies from among the Jews or Nazarenes[183] should be understood in the same manner as Qurʾān 9:23. Such allegiances are not prohibited either automatically or without any distinction; rather, they are restricted only due to *kufr* or *shirk*. There is nothing inherently wrong with having close ties with one's family nor is there

---

[179] For example, see Qurʾān 3:200, 2:45-46.

[180] Qurʾān 2:45-46: وَاسْتَعِينُواْ بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلاَةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلاَّ عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلاَقُو رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

[181] Qurʾān 9:23: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لاَ تَتَّخِذُواْ آبَاءكُمْ وَإِخْوَانَكُمْ أَوْلِيَاء إِنِ اسْتَحَبُّواْ الْكُفْرَ عَلَى الإِيمَانِ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُم مِّنكُمْ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

[182] Qurʾān 4:139: الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاء مِن دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَيَبْتَغُونَ عِندَهُمُ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ العِزَّةَ لِلّهِ جَمِيعًا

[183] For example, see Qurʾān 5:51.

anything inherently wrong with having ties with these other groups. It only becomes an issue when *kufr* or *shirk* is introduced. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Seven, the presence of *kufr*, *shirk*, or even *nifāq* does not necessitate or even permit an absolute severing of the relationship:

> *... if you hear people denying* (yukfaru) *and ridiculing God's revelation, do not sit with them unless they start to talk of other things, or else you yourselves will become like them: God will gather all the hypocrites* (munāfiqīn) *and disbelievers* (kāfirīn) *together into Hell.*[184]

Those who manifest *īmān* should not sit with people who are engaging in *kufr until* they cease doing so. When and if the cease, interaction is acceptable.

As Qurʾān 4:135 makes abundantly clear, the priority for those who manifest *īmān* should always be pursue justice in respect to other humans, even if this entails testifying against one's family or one's own self:

> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū)*, be steadfast in upholding justice* (qawwāmīn bil-qisṭ) *and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly— if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.*[185]

A similar emphasis is found in Qurʾān 49:9, which discusses the actions that should be taken when two groups of *muʾminūn* fall into conflict:

> *If two groups of the believers* (muʾminīn) *fight, you should try to reconcile them; if one of them acts wrongly* (baghat) *towards the other, fight the group which acts wrongly* (tabghī) *until they submit to God's command, then reconcile them justly* (bi-l-ʿadl) *and be even-handed between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed* (muqsiṭīn)*.*[186]

---

[184] Qurʾān 4:140 (excerpt):
... أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلاَ تَقْعُدُواْ مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُواْ فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ إِنَّكُمْ إِذًا مِّثْلُهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَامِعُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْكَافِرِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا

[185] Qurʾān 4:135:
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاء لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَى أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَى بِهِمَا فَلاَ تَتَّبِعُواْ الْهَوَى أَن تَعْدِلُواْ وَإِن تَلْوُواْ أَوْ تُعْرِضُواْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

[186] Qurʾān 49:9:
وَإِن طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِن بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِن فَاءتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

In both the use of *ʿadl* and *qisṭ*, this *āya* again elevates the concept of justice—that is, a concept associated with *taqwā*—over social or group affiliations. Another interesting aspect of this *āya* is that the wrongful action that is perpetrated by one group is expressed through the verb *B-GH-Y*. While *B-GH-Y* has many nuances, it is the same root that is used to describe the rivalry and envy that leads people who have previously received revelation to divide their unity and to reject the revelation of Muḥammad.[187] This term, B-GH-Y, also appears in another *āya* where it is juxtaposed with the most central components of *taqwā*:

> *God commands justice* (ʿadl)*, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive* (baghyī)*. He explains things to you, so that you may remember.*[188]

This juxtaposition indicates that it is a serious offense, an offense that runs contrary to the essential characteristics of *taqwā*. This term certainly means to oppress or treat wrongly. However, in light of its contextual situatedness with the Qurʾān, I suggest that it refers to a particular type of oppression, a type of oppression that arises out of mutual rivalry and the erection of boundaries along the lines of lateral difference.

Shirk

Two central actions of those who manifest *shirk* have already been encountered: they worship partners alongside of God, and they invent practices based upon their own suppositions. In relation to these, the Qurʾān offers multiple critiques of fabricated practices, such as apportioning produce and livestock to God and to their partners:

> *They apportion to God a share of the produce and the livestock He created, saying, 'This is for God'—so they claim!—'and this is for our partners* (shurakāʾinā)*.' Their partners'*

[187] For example, see Qurʾān 2:213, 42:14, 2:90-91.

[188] Qurʾān 16:90: إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاء ذِي الْقُرْبَى وَيَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاء وَالْمُنكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

(shurakāʾihim) *share does not reach God, but God's share does reach their partners* (shurakāʾihim)*: how badly they judge!*[189]

This practice is not only condemned because as an invention, but also as a vivid and concrete illustration of their misconception of God. They apportion shares to God without understanding that God has no need of such things. This is confirmed in other *āyāt* that discuss the sacrificial rites connected to the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage):

> *It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God but your piety* (taqwā)*. He has subjected them to you in this way so that you may glorify God for having guided you …*[190]

Even in the practices that God has ordained, the only thing that reaches God is *taqwā.*

This act of inventing practices is also grouped with other negatively evaluated actions, such as killing children and fabricating lies:

> *Lost indeed are those who kill their own children out of folly, with no basis in knowledge, forbidding what God has provided for them, fabricating lies against Him: they have gone far astray and have heeded no guidance.*[191]

As with the apportioning of shares, the killing of children should be understood not only as a violation of God's explicit commands, but also as a lack of understanding of and reliance upon God. As part of a much longer articulation of the correct actions in the sight of God, the manifestation of *shirk* is again grouped with the practice of killing one's children:

> *Say, 'Come! I will tell you what your Lord has really forbidden you. Do not ascribe* (tushrikū) *anything as a partner to Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your children in fear of poverty'—We will provide for you and for them …*[192]

While it is surely possible that certain groups or people have engaged in ritual activities that would involve such horrific actions, this *āya* provides another explanation. It states that people should not kill their children based on the fear that having to care for them could lead

---

[189] Qurʾān 6:136:
وَجَعَلُواْ لِلّهِ مِمَّا ذَرَأَ مِنَ الْحَرْثِ وَالأَنْعَامِ نَصِيبًا فَقَالُواْ هَـذَا لِلّهِ بِزَعْمِهِمْ وَهَـذَا لِشُرَكَآئِنَا فَمَا كَانَ لِشُرَكَآئِهِمْ فَلاَ يَصِلُ إِلَى اللّهِ وَمَا كَانَ لِلّهِ فَهُوَ يَصِلُ إِلَى شُرَكَآئِهِمْ سَاء مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

[190] Qurʾān 22:37 (excerpt):
لَن يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَكِن يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَى مِنكُمْ كَذَلِكَ سَخَّرَهَا لَكُمْ لِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا هَدَاكُمْ …

[191] Qurʾān 6:140:
قَدْ خَسِرَ الَّذِينَ قَتَلُواْ أَوْلاَدَهُمْ سَفَهًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَحَرَّمُواْ مَا رَزَقَهُمُ اللّهُ افْتِرَاء عَلَى اللّهِ قَدْ ضَلُّواْ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُهْتَدِينَ

[192] Qurʾān 6:151 (excerpt):
قُلْ تَعَالَوْاْ أَتْلُ مَا حَرَّمَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ أَلاَّ تُشْرِكُواْ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَلاَ تَقْتُلُواْ أَوْلاَدَكُم مِّنْ إمْلاَقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ …

to poverty. The *āya* then reminds that God is capable of providing for everyone. As such, those who engage in the killing of children for fear of poverty are seen as those who do not have complete trust in or appreciation of God.[193]

Two other *āyāt* are of particular interest in terms of explicating the nature and types of actions performed by those who manifest *shirk*:

> *... Woe to the associators* (mushrikīn)*, who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!*[194]

> *'He might almost have led us astray from our gods if we had not stood so firmly* (ṣabarnā) *by them.' When they see the punishment, they will know who is furthest from the path.*[195]

The first *āya* is notable because it describes those who manifest *shirk* as refraining from two of the most important actions associated with *taqwā*: paying alms and believing in the Hereafter. Moreover, these two actions are typically grouped with belief in God and prayer.[196] The Qurʾānic silence on belief in God and prayer in this *āya* confirms what has already been demonstrated. Those who manifest *shirk* believe—albeit without *ikhlaṣ*—in God, and they pray—albeit without consistency—to God.

Qurʾān 25:42 describes those who manifest *shirk* as clinging closely to the partners they associate with God. This clinging has already been indicated. However, what is important about this *āya* is that it underscores the nature of their adherence to partners. Those who manifest *shirk* demonstrate *ṣabr* in their clinging, that is, the same patient perseverance that those who manifest *īmān* and *islām* demonstrate. Only in this situation, they persevere in that which is negatively evaluated.

---

[193] The Islamic tradition is not unequivocally opposed to abortion (nor to birth control). This *āya* specifies a particular situation (fear of poverty) and should not be generalized to all situations. For example, it cannot be generalized to situations where the health of the mother is endangered.

[194] Qurʾān 41:6-7 (excerpt): ... وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُشْرِكِينَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُم بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

[195] Qurʾān 25:42: (See also Qurʾān 38:6.) إِن كَادَ لَيُضِلُّنَا عَنْ آلِهَتِنَا لَوْلَا أَن صَبَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا وَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ حِينَ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ مَنْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

[196] For example, see Qurʾān 2:2-5 and 2:177, which provide definitions of *taqwā* and *birr*.

Ḥanīf

The concept of *ḥanīf* is associated with the same type of constancy as those who manifest *īmān* and *islām*. This was explored in relation to the term *ʾaqīm*;[197] Abraham as *ḥanīf* is constant in turning his whole self towards God alone. Related to this, *ḥanīf* is also connected in two *āyāt* to the specific action of praying to God alone.[198]

In multiple occurrences, the concept *ḥanīf* is contextualized within discussions of *ḥajj*. These accounts detail Abraham's and Ishmael's construction of God's House, as well as the specific rituals associated with *ḥajj*:

> *We showed Abraham the site of the House, saying, 'Do not assign partners to Me. Purify My House for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves. Proclaim the Pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass to attain benefits and celebrate God's name, on specified days, over the livestock He has provided for them—feed yourselves and the poor and unfortunate—so let the pilgrims perform their acts of cleansing, fulfill their vows, and circle around the Ancient House.' All this: anyone who honors the sacred rites of God will have good rewards from his Lord ...*[199]

In another similar account, the *ḥajj* is described as a duty owed to God:

> *... Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to God by people who are able to undertake it. Those who reject this [should know that] God has no need of anyone.*[200]

These *āyāt* seem to indicate that the concept of *ḥanīf* has an inherent connection with the rights of *ḥajj*. Moreover, they appear to state that *ḥajj* is a universal obligation for all people. This, however, is not the case. In two of the three places[201] in the Qurʾān where the concept of

[197] For example, see Qurʾān 10:105, 30:30.
[198] See Qurʾān 10:105-106, 30:30-31.
[199] Qurʾān 22:26-30: وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَن لَّا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ
وَأَذِّن فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَى كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ
لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَّعْلُومَاتٍ عَلَى مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّن بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا الْبَائِسَ الْفَقِيرَ
ثُمَّ لْيَقْضُوا تَفَثَهُمْ وَلْيُوفُوا نُذُورَهُمْ وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ
ذَلِكَ وَمَن يُعَظِّمْ حُرُمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّهُ عِندَ رَبِّهِ ...
[200] Qurʾān 3:97 (excerpt): ... وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلاً وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ
[201] The three occurrences are Qurʾān 2:125-130, 3:96-97, 22:26-31.

ḥanīf is situated in descriptions of *ḥajj*, the descriptions conclude with references to *manāsik*, that is, to the diverse divinely-intended rites of each lateral *umma*:

> *Our Lord, make us devoted* (muslimīn) *to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You* (umma muslima)*. Show us our rites* (manāsik) *and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.*[202]
>
> *We appointed acts of devotion* (mansak) *for every community* (umma) *…*[203]

The rites of the *ḥajj* are the *manāsik* of the *umma* of Muḥammad and perhaps of the *umma* of Abraham. Thus, while Abraham is inherently connected to the *ḥajj*, the concept of *ḥanīf* is not. Rather, the concept of *ḥanīf* is inherently connected to the acknowledgement that lateral religious difference among *umam* is not the basis of evaluation or privilege. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the concept of *ḥanīf* is repeatedly juxtaposed with attempts to claim status based upon lateral difference. This has already been discussed in relation to various exclusive claims of those who manifest *kufr*. However, the response to those who attempt to do so is worthy of reiteration:

> *It will not be according to your [associators'] hopes or those of the People of the Scripture: anyone who does wrong will be requited for it and will find no one to protect or help him against God; anyone, male or female, who does good deeds* (ṣālihāt) *and is a believer* (muʾminūn)*, will enter Paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone. Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly* (ʾaslama wajhahu) *to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who are true in faith* (ḥanīf)*? …*[204]

To those who attempt to use lateral religious difference as the basis of evaluation, the Qurʾān responds unequivocally. Evaluation will not be on that basis. It will on the basis of *taqwā*, of *ṣālihāt*, of *īmān*, and to recognize such is to align oneself with the *dīn al-qayyim*, the *dīn* of the *ḥanīf*, the *dīn* of *al-islām*.

---

[202] Qurʾān 2:128: رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَآ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

[203] Qurʾān 22:34 (excerpt): وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا …

[204] Qurʾān 4:123-125 (excerpt): لَّيْسَ بِأَمَانِيِّكُمْ وَلا أَمَانِيِّ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَن يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا يُجْزَ بِهِ وَلاَ يَجِدْ لَهُ مِن دُونِ اللهِ وَلِيًّا وَلاَ نَصِيرًا وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَى وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلاَ يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لله وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ واتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا …

KUFR

In addition to the actions that have already been detailed in other sections, those who manifest *kufr* are generally described as those who ignore the laws or limits that God has established:

> *... These are the limits set by God: grievous torment awaits those who ignore* (kāfirūn) *them.*[205]

These limits or bounds are related to ritual actions, such as fasting, as well as interpersonal interactions, such as inheritance, marriage and divorce.[206] Those who manifest *kufr* are also described as violating other prescribed actions, such as upholding pledges and agreements:

> *The worst creatures in the sight of God are those who reject* (alladhīna kafarū) *Him and will not believe* (lā yuʾminūna)*; who, whenever you make an agreement with them, break it, for they have no fear of God* (lā tattaqūna)*.*[207]

It is important to note the explanation that this *āya* gives for their failure to uphold agreements; those who manifest *kufr* fail to do so because they do not have *taqwā.*

However, the most remarkable characteristic of those who manifest *kufr* is their active opposition to those who manifest *īmān*. This is clarified by returning to the story of Iblis:

> *And then Iblis said, 'Because You have put me in the wrong, I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path: I will come at them—from their front and their back, from their right and their left—and You will not find most of them grateful.' God said, 'Get out! You are disgraced and banished! I swear I shall fill Hell with you and all who follow you!*[208]

These *āyāt* recount Iblis' deliberate and conscious plan to lead people away from the path of God. This account directly follows Iblis' refusal to bow to Adam. Therefore, his pledge to lead astray is a product of Iblis' arrogance and wounded pride. Iblis holds himself to be better than Adam. Thus, when God gives blessings to Adam, Iblis is angered. However, he does not simply

---

[205] Qurʾān 58:4 (excerpt): ... وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

[206] For example, see Qurʾān 2:187, 4:12, 2:229, 65:1.

[207] Qurʾān 8:55-56: إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِندَ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَهُمْ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ عَاهَدتَّ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ يَنقُضُونَ عَهْدَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ وَهُمْ لاَ يَتَّقُونَ

[208] Qurʾān 7:11-18: وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلآئِكَةِ اسْجُدُواْ لآدَمَ فَسَجَدُواْ إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ
قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَاْ خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ
قَالَ فَأَنظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ المُنظَرِينَ قَالَ فَبِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
ثُمَّ لآتِيَنَّهُم مِّن بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَن شَمَآئِلِهِمْ وَلاَ تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ قَالَ اخْرُجْ مِنْهَا مَذْؤُومًا مَّدْحُورًا لَّمَن تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لأَمْلأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

refuse to obey and then harbor anger. Rather, he pledges to work actively and persistently against those whom he feels have compromised his status. It is this active opposition that also characterizes those who manifest *kufr*:

> *... those who turned others away from God's path and tried to make it crooked, those who denied* (kāfirūn) *the Hereafter.'*[209]
>
> *But those who strive to oppose Our messages and try in vain to defeat Us are destined for the Blaze.*[210]
>
> *But as for those who work against Our Revelations, seeking to undermine them, there will be a torment of painful suffering.*[211]

As Esack perceptively notes, *kufr* is therefore "something conscious, deliberate and active rather than a casual ignoring or disregard of the existence of God."[212] Those who manifest *kufr* are cognizant of their actions, intend to lead others astray, and demonstrate persistence in their negative actions.[213]

Islām

Many characteristics related to the actions of those who manifest *islām* have already been explicated in this chapter. Those who manifest *islām*, for example, display a constant and consistent turning towards God. The active nature of this turning is underscored by other *āyāt* that indicate that one should strive to maintain *islām* until the moment of death:

> *... 'Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.'*[214]
>
> *You who believe* (alladhīna āmanū)*, be mindful* (ʾittaqū) *of God, as is His due, and make sure you devote yourselves to Him* (muslimūn) *until your dying moment.*[215]

---

[209] Qurʾān 7:45: الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُم بِالآخِرَةِ كَافِرُونَ
[210] Qurʾān 22:51: وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُوْلَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ
[211] Qurʾān 34:5: وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُوْلَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رِّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ
[212] Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation and Pluralism*, 136.
[213] See also Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 171.
[214] Qurʾān 12:101 (excerpt): ... تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ
[215] Qurʾān 3:102: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ اتَّقُواْ اللّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلاَ تَمُوتُنَّ إِلاَّ وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ

The fact that Qurʾān 3:102 is addressed to those who manifest *īmān* further illuminates the necessity for every individual to strive to maintain *islām* in every moment.

As indicated in the preceding exploration of *ḥanīf*, the concept of *islām* is similarly invoked in descriptions of the divinely-intended *manāsik* of each lateral *umma*. Like the concept of *ḥanīf*, the concept of *islām* acts as a reassertion of evaluation based only on *taqwā*.[216] Not surprisingly, the concept of *islām* is also linked with the central actions of *taqwā*, including praying, paying alms, acknowledging God, and doing good works:

> *... So keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and seek refuge in God: He is your protector—an excellent protector and an excellent helper.*[217]
>
> *In fact, any who direct themselves wholly* (ʾaslama wajhahu) *to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[218]
>
> *Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right* (ṣāliha)*, and says, 'I am one of those devoted to God* (muslimīn)*'?*[219]

However, as stated in Qurʾān 41:33, those who manifest *islām* not only perform these *taqwā*-related actions, but they also call others to God and explicitly identify themselves as people devoted to God. This type of explicit identification was also examined in reference to those who manifest *īmān*. In both cases, it serves as a point of contrast with those who manifest *nifāq*—those who fear people more than God—and therefore never reveal their true convictions for fear that it would compromise their social and economic position. In contrast, the explicit statement of those who manifest *islām* and *īmān* can be interpreted as a sign of their primary dependence upon and allegiance to the vertical relationship with God, a dependence and

---

[216] Qurʾān 22:34: (See also Qurʾān 2:128.) وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَى مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّن بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ فَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ

[217] Qurʾān 22:78:
وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ مِّلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِن قَبْلُ وَفِي هَٰذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

[218] Qurʾān 2:112: بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِندَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

[219] Qurʾān 41:33: وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّن دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

allegiance that dictates their actions on the horizontal level (that is, calling others to what is good, to God).

NIFĀQ

Those who manifest *nifāq* display a discordance between their words and deeds;[220] they make statements that do not align with their actions. This is not only evident in their relationship to God and response to God's guidance, but also in their actions and interactions. Qurʾān 59:11-12, for instance, describes the empty pledges of support they make to other people:

> *Have you considered the hypocrites* (munāfiqūn) *who say to their fellows, the disbelievers* (alladhīna kafarū) *among the People of the Scripture, 'If you are driven out, we shall go with you—we would never listen to anyone who sought to harm you—and if you are attacked, we shall certainly come to your aid'? God bears witness that they are in fact liars: if they are driven out, they will never leave with them; if they are attacked, they will never help them. Even if they did come to their aid, they would soon turn tail and flee—in the end they would have no help.*[221]

Although those who manifest *nifāq* adamantly promise to assist others, they will never follow through in action. Moreover, this *āya* also indicates that the discordance of their words and deeds is not only with respect to those who manifest *īmān*;[222] they are equally inconsistent and unreliable with other groups. In fact, those who manifest *nifāq* are not even united or dependable among themselves:

> *... There is much hostility between them: you think they are united but their hearts are divided because they are people devoid of reason.*[223]

---

[220] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 207-209.

[221] Qurʾān 59:11-12:
أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا يَقُولُونَ لِإِخْوَانِهِمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَئِنْ أُخْرِجْتُمْ لَنَخْرُجَنَّ مَعَكُمْ وَلَا نُطِيعُ فِيكُمْ أَحَدًا أَبَدًا وَإِن قُوتِلْتُمْ لَنَنصُرَنَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ
لَئِنْ أُخْرِجُوا لَا يَخْرُجُونَ مَعَهُمْ وَلَئِن قُوتِلُوا لَا يَنصُرُونَهُمْ وَلَئِن نَّصَرُوهُمْ لَيُوَلُّنَّ الْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ

[222] For example, see Qurʾān 9:56-59.

[223] Qurʾān 59:14 (excerpt):
... بَأْسُهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ شَدِيدٌ تَحْسَبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَّا يَعْقِلُونَ

They are free agents; they float from group to group seeking individual benefit. The discordance they manifest is also compared to the actions of Iblis, who entices people to stray from the path of God, and then disowns them in the face of God:

> *Like Satan, who says to man, 'Do not believe!' but when man disbelieves, says, 'I disown you; I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds.'*[224]

This comparison indicates that those who manifest *nifāq* not only display a discordance between their own belief and actions, but they also encourage others to do so as well:

> *They have used their oaths to cover up, and barred others from the path of God ...*[225]

> *The hypocrites, both men and women* (munāfiqūn *and* munāfiqāt)*, are all the same: they order what is wrong and forbid what is right; they are tight-fisted. They have ignored God, so He has ignored them. The hypocrites are the disobedient ones.*[226]

The preceding *āya* directly contrasts those who manifest *nifāq* with those who manifest *īmān*. Those who manifest *nifāq* order the wrong and forbid the right, and they refuse to give from their wealth or to pay alms. These actions are central elements of *taqwā*. When they do engage in actions associated with *taqwā*—and they do—they perform them only in order to be seen by others and even then as if they are under duress:

> *The hypocrites* (munāfiqūn) *try to deceive God, but it is He who causes them to be deceived. When they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly, showing off in front of people, and remember God only a little, wavering all the time between this and that, belonging neither to one side nor the other ...*[227]

The Qurʾān also indicates that those who manifest *nifāq* frequently appear impressive in their words and material possessions. However, in reality they are superficial and devoid of any true convictions or allegiances:

---

[224] Qurʾān 59:16: كَمَثَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِذْ قَالَ لِلْإِنسَانِ اكْفُرْ فَلَمَّا كَفَرَ قَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنكَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ

[225] Qurʾān 58:16 (excerpt): اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ...

[226] Qurʾān 9:67: الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ بَعْضُهُم مِّن بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمُنكَرِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَقْبِضُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ نَسُواْ اللّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

[227] Qurʾān 4:142-143 (excerpt): إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُواْ إِلَى الصَّلاَةِ قَامُواْ كُسَالَى يُرَآؤُونَ النَّاسَ وَلاَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللّهَ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً مُّذَبْذَبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ لاَ إِلَى هَـؤُلاء وَلاَ إِلَى هَـؤُلاء ...

> *When you see them, their outward appearance pleases you; when they speak, you listen to what they say. But they are like propped-up timbers—they think every cry they hear is against them—and they are the enemy …*[228]

The nature of those who manifest *nifāq* is vividly and comprehensively summarized in comparison with a description of those who manifest *taqwā*. *Sūrat al-ʿimrān* describes the *muttaqūn*:

> *Those who are steadfast* (ṣābirīn)*, truthful, truly devout, who give and pray before dawn for forgiveness.*[229]

Those manifest *nifāq* diverge from each of these. They are not steadfast, rather they waver constantly. They are not truthful, but always say what benefits them in any particular situation. They are not devout, but fear people more than God. If they give, they give only a little and remind others of their gifts.[230] If they pray, they pray only to be seen, not to seek forgiveness in the seclusion of the night.[231]

5. Conclusion

In light of the preceding exploration of the concepts of hierarchical religious difference, I will conclude this chapter by making a few analytical observations about the nature of these concepts and noting some of the resultant implications. To begin, it is evident that each concept is complex and multifaceted; each concept is defined by an intricate array of central characteristics in terms of the belief, responses, actions, and interactions.

---

[228] Qurʾān 63:4 (excerpt): (See also Qurʾān 9:54-55.)
وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِن يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعْ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشُبٌ مُّسَنَّدَةٌ يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ …

[229] Qurʾān 3:17:
الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

[230] See Qurʾān 2:264.

[231] This does not refer to the obligatory prayers, which are done in congregational (i.e., public) format. This refers to prayers or supplications for forgiveness.

Second, all of the concepts are characterized by an active and deliberate nature. Not one of the concepts is defined based upon the simple neglect of belief or action.[232] Whether it be those who manifest *shirk* and unfalteringly cling to the ways of their forefathers, or those who manifest *īmān* and strive constantly to maintain *ṣabr*.

Third—and closely related to the fact that these concepts signify active postures—the concepts themselves are dynamic. They do not denote fixed or static positions, but rather dynamic manifestations that can increase and decrease. This is apparent in the description of revelation increasing the *īmān* of some and the hostility of others. This is also evident in the multitude of reminders to display *taqwā* that are issued even to those who already manifest *īmān*.[233]

Fourth, the concepts—while each having unique facets—overlap with one another. Those who manifest *shirk* are at described as engaging in *kufr* and vice versa. Those who manifest *nifāq* engage in some of the actions associated with *īmān* and *islām*. These overlaps challenge the notion of discrete boundaries and clearly delineated distinctions. However, this overlapping does not indicate that these traits are subsumed under others, since the Qurʾān deliberately maintains the different concepts.[234]

Fifth, a central aspect of each of these concepts relates to their negotiation of the horizontal and vertical relationships. *Shirk*, *kufr*, and *nifāq* represent diverse infringements upon the prioritization of the relationship with God. Those who manifest *shirk* prioritize their social relationships through clinging to inherited practices. Those who manifest *kufr* prioritize lateral religious affiliation through claims of exclusive and special status. Those who manifest *nifāq* prioritize individual and material welfare on the horizontal level over all else. The

[232] See also Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 133, 137.
[233] See also Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 144.
[234] For example, *shirk* and *kufr* do overlap, but they are maintained as distinct in *āyāt* such as Qurʾān 98:1.

concepts of *īmān*, *ḥanīf* and *islām* demonstrate the reverse of this: placing the relationship with God and the emphasis on *taqwā* above all else. More significantly, they also offer incisive and diverse critiques of the other traits. For instance, the behavior of the *ḥanīf* is a counterpoint to the blind adherence to inherited practices and allegiance to social groups associated with *shirk*; *īmān*, with its emphasis on consistency and justice, rails against the wavering and injustice of *nifāq*; and all three—*īmān*, *ḥanīf* and *islām*—contend with the lateral exclusivism of *kufr*.

These observations about the nature of the Qurʾānic discourse on hierarchical religious difference have many implications. One of the most prominent relates to the notion of threshold criteria. As seen in the historical Islamic discourse, there have been many attempts to establish simple and singular threshold criteria by which to indicate an individual's alignment with these concepts. This has been part of the effort to erect unambiguous and enforceable boundaries between groups. While I have already argued against the indiscriminate alignment of these concepts with any historical lateral community, the issue of threshold criteria remains. One may admit that *taqwā* is not automatically confined to a particular historical group, while still maintaining the singular necessity of explicitly recognizing Muḥammad. This indirectly results in the same confinement of *taqwā* to the historical community of Muḥammad. This position *is* supported by the Qurʾānic command not to distinguish between any messengers. Since the Muslim community recognizes some other messengers as well as Muḥammad, they become the only ones who manifest *taqwā*, whereas others fall short. There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that this position is supported with reference to the same Qurʾānic *āyāt* (those that state "*lā nufarriqū*") that rail against automatic privileging of lateral groups. I do not dispute that these *āyāt* and many others order people to recognize Muḥammad and critique them for failing to do so. The question is whether

this is the primary and prerequisite criterion that defines a supposed boundary between *taqwā* and all else.

In light of the complexity and dynamism of the concepts, it is almost impossible to prioritize only one aspect above the all others. This does not mean that recognition of Muḥammad is not part of *īmān* or *islām*. It clearly is. However, is it the singular prerequisite? It is important to unpack the implications of such an assertion. To present it as such is to place all other aspects in a secondary role, aspects such as good works, praying, paying alms, believing in God, and believing in judgment. If explicit acknowledgement of Muḥammad is a prerequisite or threshold criterion, then it implies that these actions have no salvific value[235] if they are performed in the absence of the explicit recognition. This is a difficult argument to make in the face of repeated Qurʾānic assertions about those who believe in God and perform good deeds being rewarded.[236]

Even if it were possible (or beneficial) to select one criterion to demarcate the threshold, that criterion would have to be recognition of God. There is no way to elevate the recognition of Muḥammad over the recognition of God as a singular threshold criterion. What is interesting about this is that every human being is depicted as recognizing God, though they have various misconceptions in that regard. They may periodically be forgetful. They may join others with God. However, they all recognize God, and in doing so, they could all be depicted as manifesting at least a miniscule amount of *taqwā*.[237] The argument could be made that these are not correct ways of recognizing God and therefore they are devoid of all value. However,

[235] I specify salvific value here in order to indicate value in the sight of God. Some scholars accept such actions as having social or worldly value, but no value with God. See also Muhammad Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam": Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism," in *Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil (forthcoming).
[236] For example, see Qurʾān 16:97, 18:2, 18:88.
[237] See also the section on "uncreated faith" in L. Gardet, "Īmān," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, vol. 3, 1170.

since the Qurʾānic discourse depicts dynamic levels and degrees of *taqwā*, it is hard to determine what would count as the lowest level or the cut-off point.

There are many other possible criteria or combinations of criteria that could be identified to demarcate boundaries. The real question, however, is whether boundaries are even the issue. The Qurʾānic discourse on hierarchical religious difference does not appear to be consumed with boundary delineation, but rather with complexity, dynamism, and relationality. The discourse presents the possibility of different individuals manifesting the same concept in diverse ways, to diverse degrees, and with diverse consistency. Once complexity, dynamism and degrees of actualization are admitted within any one concept, it becomes almost impossible to confine those elements within discrete and static boundaries.

Moreover, the discourse indicates that one individual could manifest multiple concepts simultaneously. Izutsu flatly denies this possibility, acknowledging only, for example, that people could have *īmān* and *kufr* in succession.[238] Izutsu's position is made possible only because of his conceptual opposition, but it is also based on an overly simplified view of these concepts. If people believe in God, the Hereafter, are good to their parents, pay alms, pray, remain steadfast, but think that their historical community is an automatically privileged community in the eyes of God, what are they manifesting? Are they not manifesting *īmān* and *kufr* simultaneously? They may manifest more *īmān* than *kufr*, but they do manifest both.

Moving away from the emphasis on boundary delineation, however, should not be misconstrued as relativism. It is not an attempt to validate universally and automatically all people, all actions, or all beliefs. As has been explicated in this chapter, the various concepts depict concrete beliefs, responses, actions and interactions that are positively and negatively

[238] Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts*, 217; Esack, *Qurʾān, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 120.

evaluated. The fact that boundaries are not clearly defined does not mean that content is not ascertainable. In fact, it is precisely by shifting the focus away from static and discrete boundaries that the true nuances and intricacies of the Qurʾānic discourse—the evaluative discourse—are illuminated.

Chapter Nine

A *Muslima* Theology of Religious Pluralism: Sameness, Difference and Relationality

1. Introduction

In critiquing the contemporary Islamic discourse on religious difference, I identified two interconnected shortcomings. The first was the shared conception of difference as that which divides humanity through the erection of clear, static, and impermeable boundaries, and the second was the resultant failure to account in an integrated manner for both sameness and difference without resorting either to isolation or to hierarchy. In the preceding two chapters, I have aimed to address the first by distinguishing between lateral and hierarchical religious difference, and by re-envisioning the concepts of hierarchical difference as complex, dynamic and interrelated. By way of concluding this study, in this chapter I will build upon this dual reconceptualization of difference in order to re-weave creation, lateral difference, and hierarchal difference into a coherent—although complex and at times ambiguous—account.

In doing so, I will explore creation, the relationship between creation and revelation, the relationship between revelations, and the purpose of lateral difference. Some of these topics have been introduced in previous chapters, but the goal in this chapter is to bring them together and to begin to unpack the implications of the reconceptualization of difference for each. I will conclude this chapter—and this study—by arguing that the discussion of religious

difference is not only about thinking differently about difference, but also about thinking differently about the Qurʾān itself.

2. Creation and Theological Anthropology

The Qurʾān affirms God as the Creator of all humanity. God creates the singular *nafs* and then the *zawj*. From this shared origin emerge all human beings, who are described as being scattered far and wide.[1] The Qurʾān also states that all humans were created with a singular purpose, that is, to worship God and act as God's vicegerent on earth.[2] In order to fulfill this purpose, they have been equipped with the necessary tools.[3] Humanity has been created in the best form—that is, the form most suitable to its purpose—and has been equipped with faculties such as hearing, sight, and minds.[4] These aspects of human creation refer not only to the literal physical faculties, but also to a more general capacity for comprehension and receptivity to God's guidance. This non-literal interpretation is confirmed in repeated Qurʾānic descriptions in which those who reject guidance, who do not believe or who fail to reflect upon God's natural *āyāt* are described as having sealed hearts, being deaf, or being blind.[5]

---

[1] Qurʾān 4:1: "People (*nās*), be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul (*nafs*), and from it created its mate (*zawj*), and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God (*ʾittaqū*), in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship: God is always watching over you."

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالاً كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاء وَاتَّقُواْ اللّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءلُونَ بِهِ وَالأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

[2] Qurʾān 51:56: "I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me."

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

Qurʾān 2:30 (excerpt): "When your Lord told the angels, 'I am putting a vicegerent on earth …"

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً …

[3] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 135.

[4] Qurʾān 95:4-6: "We create humankind in the best form then reduce him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good deeds."

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ

Qurʾān 32:7-9: "Who gave everything its perfect form. He first created man from clay, then made his descendants from an extract of underrated fluid. Then He molded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him; He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful!"

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنسَانِ مِن طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِن سُلَالَةٍ مِّن مَّاء مَّهِينٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

[5] Qurʾān 2:7: "God has sealed their hearts and their ears, and their eyes are covered."

خَتَمَ اللّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَى أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عظِيمٌ

In addition to these faculties, God has endowed all of humanity with knowledge of God and of *taqwā*. All the Children of Adam are depicted as testifying to their recognition of God as their Lord and sustainer,[6] and the *nafs* is depicted as having an innate awareness of *taqwā*.[7] It is in this sense that humanity as whole was once a single community (*umma waḥida*); at the time of creation, all of humanity was unified in terms of *taqwā*.[8] The existence of such knowledge, however, is not a guarantee that humanity will sustain awareness or act in accordance with that awareness. Humans can choose—or more accurately will have to choose—whether to grow in *taqwā* or to bury it. The allusion to burying is significant as it implies that this nature of the soul—the knowledge of *taqwā*—is something that can be hidden but not eradicated. The testimony of the Children of Adam similarly indicates the potential of humans to act counter to their innate knowledge of God (*fiṭra*); on the Day of Judgment, some humans will find themselves having to make excuses for their failures.

Qurʾān 27:80-81: "You cannot make the dead hear, you cannot make the deaf listen to your call when they turn their backs and leave, you cannot guide the blind out of their error: you cannot make anyone hear you except those who believe in Our signs and submit (*muslimūn*)."

إِنَّكَ لَا تُسْمِعُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ وَمَا أَنتَ بِهَادِي الْعُمْيِ عَن ضَلَالَتِهِمْ إِن تُسْمِعُ إِلَّا مَن يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُم مُّسْلِمُونَ

[6] Qurʾān 7:172-173: "When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,' or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?'"

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُواْ بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُواْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ أَوْ تَقُولُواْ إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِّن بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

[7] Qurʾān 91:7-10: "By the soul (*nafs*) and how He formed it and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety (*taqwā*)! The one who causes it to grow in purity succeeds and the one who buries it fails.

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا

[8] Qurʾān 2:213: "Humankind (*nās*) was a single community (*umma waḥida*), then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path."

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِيمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لِمَا اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

Qurʾān 10:19: "Humankind (*nās*) was originally one single community (*umma waḥida*), but later they differed. If it had not been for a word from your Lord, judgment would already have been passed between them regarding their differences."

وَمَا كَانَ النَّاسُ إِلاَّ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَاخْتَلَفُواْ وَلَوْلاَ كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ فِيمَا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

Humanity, therefore, is also universally endowed with another quality: freedom. Humans are created both "capable of action as well as free to act or not to act."[9] While this freedom permits the possibility of acting in discordance with their purpose, it is in actuality only through free acquiescence that worship of God has any meaning. Moreover, it is only through the combination of capacity—in faculties and knowledge—and freedom that humans become moral subjects, that they are held accountable and are subject to God's judgment.[10]

It is this depiction of the universal capacity, freedom and accountability of all humanity that, in my opinion, forms the foundation of the Qurʾānic discourse. At the moment of creation, every individual stands in the exact same relationship with God; they are the capable creations of God and the objects of God's concern.[11] It is vital to underscore, however, that the universal and positive affirmation of all humanity that results from this depiction is simultaneously an affirmation of equal responsibility and equal liability to judgment. In other words, since what is bestowed through creation is sufficient to fulfill one's purpose, no individual will be exempted from fulfilling that purpose. While there are other forms of guidance that will come after creation, the ability to fulfill one's purpose is not exclusively dependent upon those forms. This creates a unique characteristic of the Qurʾānic discourse: from the most basic level, the Qurʾān affirms all people, though it never affirms all actions.

The aspects of creation discussed thus far revolve around sameness, but creation also involves difference, that is, divinely-intended lateral difference. This is indicated in the creation of the *zawj* from the one *nafs*,[12] as well as in the deliberate creation of diverse nations,

[9] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 133.
[10] This is why certain individuals, who either lack capacities or freedom, are exempted from responsibility and accountability.
[11] See al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 133; Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 15.
[12] See Qurʾān 4:1. See footnote 1.

tribes,[13] languages and colors among humanity.[14] Notably, none of these forms of lateral difference impinges upon the status, capacity, purpose or responsibility of all humans. Descriptions of lateral difference are quickly followed by exhortations to manifest *taqwā* or explicit statements that divine assessment will be based only on *taqwā.*

Moreover, these forms of lateral difference serve a purpose, which the Qurʾān describes in two ways. As in Qurʾān 30:20-22, lateral difference is an *āya* (a sign) of God; it is something designed to cause awe and provoke reflection, thus leading to recognition and glorification of God. In Qurʾān 49:13, lateral difference is described as something that is created so that people may recognize one another or become acquainted with one another. What is the value of recognizing one another? While the text does not expound in any further detail, there are certain deductions that can be made. First, whatever the value is, it cannot be achieved in isolation; becoming acquainted with each other requires engagement. Therefore, it is safe to assume that God is encouraging interaction across the boundaries of lateral difference. Second, a reflective and engaged encounter with the lateral 'other' reveals something about God. This is similar to the often reiterated value of reflecting on *āyāt.* Specifically, it reveals that the lateral 'other'—despite its lateral particularities—is also the creation, concern and subject of God. This underscores the singular status and infinite capacity of God as Creator, but it also reveals something about the 'self.' It reveals that both the 'other' and the 'self' stand in the

[13] Qurʾān 49:13: "People (*nās*), We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him (*ʾatqākum*): God is all knowing, all aware."
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

[14] Qurʾān 30:20-22: "One of His signs (*āyāt*) is that He created you from dust and—lo and behold!—you became human and scattered far and wide. Another of His signs (*āyāt*) is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs (*āyāt*) in this for those who reflect. Another of His signs (*āyāt*) is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. There truly are signs (*āyāt*) in this for those who know."
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَنتُم بَشَرٌ تَنتَشِرُونَ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُم مَّوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالِمِينَ

same relationship with God; it reveals that lateral difference does not put one in a privileged status before God nor reduce to other simply to a derivative status.

3. Creation and Revelation

What are the implications of the preceding depiction of created sameness and difference for understanding revelation?[15] Given that humanity is not situated in an initial position of incapacity, but rather one of capacity, what is the purpose of revelation?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it is vital to reiterate the hermeneutical importance of theological interconnections. Frequently, the value of revelation is discussed on the given assumption that one specific revelation has ultimate value. Thus, other revelations—if acknowledged as valid—are to be interpreted in a manner that sustains the ultimate value of that specific revelation. Other revelations are variously presented as partial, particular to a limited context, or corrupted. While some consideration may be given to the implications of such assessments for other aspects of theology, the primary issue at stake is to maintain the preeminence of the specific revelation. Though it is possible that a specific revelation does have ultimate value, the discussion of such must begin with and remain connected to an understanding of God and theological anthropology. Therefore in this section, I will attempt to situate the phenomenon of revelation in general in relationship with what was previously outlined in respect to God's creation of humanity.

The principal assertion is that creation, natural *āyāt* and revelation are not sequential steps in a linear hierarchy, but rather entangled and mutually reinforcing aspects of one system aimed at assisting humans to fulfill their singular purpose, that is, to worship God and

[15] Revelation does not necessarily refer to the physical scriptures of various communities. More broadly, it describes God's interaction with humanity.

manifest *taqwā*. Humans are created capable of achieving their purpose, and this capacity has not been compromised through any event. This is why scholars including al-Fārūqī, Hassan, and even Legenhausen adamantly argue against the insinuation of the concept of the Fall into the Qurʾān.[16] As al-Fārūqī contends, "Islam entertains no idea of fall, of original sin, or of a predicament from which man may not extricate himself by his own effort."[17] The nuances of what al-Fārūqī is arguing are important. God has created humans capable, but God has also created them free. Humans will find themselves in 'predicaments'; they will forget, be deceived, and be led astray due to rivalry and arrogance. However, with exertion and actualization of the inherent created capacities—the *fiṭra*—they are able to extricate themselves. It is important to note, however, that exertion and actualization do not imply that humans are self-sufficient; rather, employment of these capacities is an engagement in the on-going relationship between God and humankind.[18] Furthermore, the 'predicaments' in which humans may find themselves do not obliterate the created human capacities. Knowledge and capacities can be buried but not destroyed,[19] and God's creation of the human *fiṭra* can never be altered.[20]

Moreover, exertion and actualization of the *fiṭra* take place in relation to the rest of the creation—that is, God's natural *āyāt*—and in relation to revelation. While, as the example of Abraham demonstrates, it is possible to reflect on creation alone and gain thereby an understanding of God, not all humans will exert themselves in this manner. As also discussed

[16] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 138; Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," 44; Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," 56.
[17] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 138.
[18] See also Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988), 94.
[19] Qurʾān 91:7-10. See footnote 7.
[20] Qurʾān 30:30 (excerpt): "... This is the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) God instilled in mankind—there is no altering God's creation ..."
... فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ...

in in Chapter Eight, humans in general—even people who manifest *īmān*—perpetually struggle with sustaining the recognition of God and the expression of *taqwā*. In fact, this was the 'predicament' even of Adam; he had been given knowledge, had made a pledge or covenant with God, but forgot and was deceived.[21] It is here that one of the most significant roles of revelation becomes evident. Like water that falls upon the earth and stirs it to grow,[22] revelation stirs the innate *fiṭra* of human beings. The seed that will grow is already there, but the seed benefits from cultivation and nurture. In this way, it is possible to conceive of the relationship between creation and revelation as the relationship between God as creator and God as sustainer.[23] God creates with perfection and demonstrates mercy in perpetually sustaining—or re-creating—that creation. It is important to reiterate that God not only does so through revelation, but also though ongoing natural *āyāt*, ongoing signs designed to evoke awe and rouse the *fiṭra*.

In light of this, revelation in general should be considered as something gratuitous.[24] Gratuitous in the technical sense of not being the only means by which humans can arrive at an understanding of God, and gratuitous in the theological sense of being a freely given mercy and blessing from God. Revelation is not something that comes to remedy inherent deficiencies in capacity; rather, revelation is something that illuminates the same knowledge that was instilled in humanity from the beginning and which humanity is capable—with

---

[21] Qurʾān 20:115: "We also took a covenant (*ʿahd*) with Adam before you, but he forgot and We found him lacking in constancy."

وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَى آدَمَ مِن قَبْلُ فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا

[22] Qurʾān 41:39 (excerpt): "Another of His signs (*āyāt*) is this: you see the earth lying desolate (*khāshiʿatan*), but when We send water down on to it, it stirs and grows …"

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنَّكَ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ خَاشِعَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاء اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ …

[23] It is important to note that the acts of creating and sustaining are not discretely distinguished within the Islamic tradition. God does not create and then recede. Rather, God is depicted as being engaged in a process of ongoing creation. For more information, see R. Arnaldez, "Ḵẖalḳ," in Bearman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, vol. 4, 980.

[24] See also al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 135-137.

exertion—of discovering through created faculties and contemplation of natural *āyāt*.[25] In this sense, revelation is a reiteration, a reminder, a guide and a warning. It does not bring something new, but highlights and reasserts the same message of *taqwā*. The fact that revelation reiterates what is instilled through creation is also evident in the Qurʾān's questioning of people who will not accept the revelation; they are questioned as to why they will not believe when they already made a pledge to God.[26] They already testified that God was their creator and Lord, but they still refuse to believe. The Qurʾān does not call them to affirm something new, but rather to reaffirm what is latent.

While revelation may be conceived of as gratuitous in the technical and theological senses, the Qurʾān also presents it as being universal.[27] There is no *umma* that has not been sent revelation. While this Qurʾānic assertion is widely accepted at face value, its implications have not been fully unpacked. The first implication of universal revelation is similar to one of the implications of a universal and capable *fiṭra*: all humanity is accountable to God and subject to judgment. The second implication is that it reasserts God's concern with all of humanity, not just a select group. The third implication is that it raises important questions about the boundaries of concepts, such as the People of the Scripture, that is, those who have received God's revelation. Scholarly discourse has tended to restrict this denotation to Jews and Christians, maybe Sabians and Zoroastrians. Given what is known about human history and geography, it seems difficult to make the case that these groups comprise the totality of those who have received revelation. Thus, there are two options. One is to restrict this denotation to

[25] al-Fārūqī, *Islam and Other Faiths*, 136-137.

[26] Qurʾān 57:8: "Why should you not believe (*tuʾminūn*) in God when the Messenger calls you to believe in your Lord, and He has already made a pledge (*mīthāq*) with you, if you have faith (*muʾminīn*)?"
وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ وَقَدْ أَخَذَ مِيثَاقَكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

[27] Qurʾān 35:24: "We have sent you [Prophet] with the Truth as a bearer of good news and warning—every community (*umma*) has been sent a warner."
إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ

these few groups and accept a relative silence on the part of Qurʾān with respect to a multitude of other communities. The other choice is to reconceive this term as more inclusive, and even possibly wholly inclusive. The latter may seem to be a radical supposition, but if revelation is truly universal and the term *kitāb* does not refer just to a physical book of scripture[28] then this conclusion is feasible. Moreover, inclusion within this category cannot be based upon perfect adherence to *taqwā* or absolute monotheism, since the Qurʾān criticizes some of the People of the Scripture for failing in both of these regards. The purpose of reinterpreting this category, therefore, is not to automatically raise the value of religious 'others,' but rather to gain more insight into the Qurʾānic message. The value of religious 'others' could not be assessed on this basis anyhow since it is a category of lateral religious difference. While I will not undertake this task in this study, what new insights may be gleaned if this category were reread in light of the Qurʾān's own teaching about the universality of revelation? Additionally, might the borders of the category People of the Scripture not only expand outward but also fold inward? Would it not be possible, after the Qurʾānic revelation, to understand even the recipients of the Qurʾān to be People of the Scripture? I am not contending that the Qurʾān employs the denotation with this referent. However, I am suggesting that once the Qurʾānic revelation occurs those that follow it find themselves in some of the same situations as the earlier People of the Scripture.

Revelation also has a unique relationship with lateral difference. As explored in Chapter Seven, revelation is sent to *umam*, and *umam* in some fashion are the products of the lateral difference introduced in creation. Moreover, revelation also introduces new forms of lateral religious difference in terms of diverse rites, practices, ways and laws. What is

[28] Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image*, 194.

intriguing, however, is that, even though it is closely connected to lateral difference, the primary goal of revelation is related to hierarchical difference. The primary goal of revelation is to reiterate the message of *taqwā*, to foster its manifestation, and to address differences that have arisen in terms of *taqwā*. The close relationship with lateral difference seems to indicate that the purpose of revelation can only be achieved through responsiveness to and production of lateral difference. In fact, it seems that one of the primary means by which revelation aims to eradicate hierarchical difference—that is, difference in terms of *taqwā*—is through lateral particularities.

4. Revelation and Revelations

Since there have been multiple revelations, the next question that arises is about the relationship between the various revelations. Does one complete another? Do they change each other? What is the appropriate response on the part of those who have already received revelation to the arrival of a new revelation?

Before addressing these specific questions, it is worth reflecting back momentarily on the universality of revelation. Discussions of the relationship between revelations usually focus only on those revelations associated with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These revelations may be more closely related than others, and they are the background against and part of the context within which the Qurʾān speaks. However, they are not the entirety of revelation.[29] By simply considering this fact, the effort to depict revelations as occurring in a neat line of supersession is greatly complexified. If the universality of revelation is taken seriously, then it is possible that multiple revelations were communicated simultaneously.

[29] Qurʾān 40:78 (excerpt): "We have sent other messengers before you—some We have mentioned to you and some We have not …"

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُم مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُم مَّن لَّمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ …

While I will not explore these possibilities in this chapter, they do prompt new questions and challenge the typical depiction of sequential revelation.

In distinguishing between lateral and hierarchical religion difference, I have already discussed the relationship between revelations fairly extensively, arguing that the hierarchical exhortation to *taqwā* is something common in all revelations, while the lateral laws, rites and ways are particular to each revelation. In connection to *taqwā*, not only is the exhortation common to every revelation, but it is fully communicated in every revelation. As a result, there can be no conception of a partial or incomplete revelation. Inversely, there can be no conception of a revelation that comes to complete another revelation. This position is supported by the Qurʾānic description of later revelations as *muṣaddiq* (confirming) of earlier revelations. This depiction is applied, for example, to the relationship between the Gospel and the Torah,[30] as well as the relationship between the Qurʾān and earlier revelations.[31]

What about the question of change? Can one revelation come to change another? In reference to hierarchical difference, this is a moot point. If the same message of *taqwā* is completely communicated in every revelation, then there is nothing to change. However, revelations can act as reminders in reference to other revelations or communities of revelation. This is why there are numerous Qurʾānic *āyāt* which exhort those who had already received revelation to uphold it and which critique them for failing to do so.[32] Additionally, revelations are described as explaining or making things clear to people who had previously

[30] Qurʾān 5:46: "We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm (*muṣaddiq*) the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and confirmation (*muṣaddiq*) of the Torah already revealed— a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God (*muttaqīn*)."
وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَى آثَارِهِم بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

[31] Qurʾān 5:48 (excerpt): "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming (*muṣaddiq*) the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them …"
وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ …

[32] For example, see Qurʾān 5:68.

received revelation.[33] Making things clear, however, should not be understood as changing or supplementing the original message. Clarification is something which is only necessary and appropriate once an original and complete message has been delivered. Clarification is not needed because of any deficiency in the original revelation, but may be necessary because the recipients have neglected their revelation or because they have fallen into disagreements over it. However, when a revelation acts as a reminder or clarification to another it does so in terms of hierarchical difference alone; it reemphasizes and restates the message of *taqwā*. In this way, there is a certain parallel between the relationship of revelations to one another and the relationship of creation to revelation; the full and perfect message of *taqwā* is available, but humans as individuals benefit from constant reminders.

The fact that the Qurʾān understands all revelations to contain the same, complete, and unchanging message of *taqwā* is also supported in reference to the descriptions of the appropriate response to new revelations and messengers. Those who previously received revelation are described as recognizing (*ʿ-R-F*) and bearing witness (*SH-Ḥ-D*) to the new revelation.[34] What they recognize is the singular message of *taqwā*, the same message that is contained in their revelation and confirmed in the new revelation. The notion of recognition is also intimately connected with *mīthāq al-nabiyyīn* (the pledge of the prophets).[35] In this pledge,

---

[33] Qurʾān 5:15: "People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to make clear (*yubayyinu*) to you much of what you have kept hidden of the Scripture, and to overlook much. A light has now come to you from God, and a Scripture making things clear (*mubīn*)."

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِّمَّا كُنتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَن كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءكُم مِّنَ اللهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُّبِينٌ

Qurʾān 27:76: "Truly, this Qurʾān explains to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about ..."

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَقُصُّ عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَكْثَرَ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

[34] Qurʾān 5:83: "And when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses."

وَإِذَا سَمِعُواْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَى أَعْيُنَهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُواْ مِنَ الْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

[35] Qurʾān 3:81-85: "God took a pledge through the prophets (*mīthāq al-nabiyyīn*), saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming (*muṣaddiq*) what you have been given, you must believe (*tuʾminunna*) in him and support (*tanṣurunna*) him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' They said, 'We do.' He said, 'Then bear witness and I too will bear witness.' Those who turn away after this

the recipients of revelation promise that if another messenger comes and confirms the message they have already received—that is, the message of *taqwā*—then they must believe (*ʾ-M-N*) in and support (*N-Ṣ-R*) that messenger. To do otherwise would be to turn away from *islām*, true devotion to God, and to draw distinctions between the various messengers and messages. I have already discussed the harsh critiques that are lodged against those who make such distinctions due to rivalry and envy, and divide themselves into factions (*aḥzāb*). In contrast, those who do not make such distinctions (*lā tafarriqu*) recognize and affirm the continuity of all revelations; they believe in them and support them.

In Chapter Eight, I discussed another response to revelation, obedience. Those who manifest *īmān* were described as hearing and obeying the revelation and messenger. The question that arises is whether there is a difference between believing and supporting—the responses demanded of those who previously received revelation—and obeying—the appropriate response of the primary recipients of the current revelation. One thing that is clear is that obedience is not something unique to any one messenger; it is the command of every messenger.[36] Significantly, the call to obedience is typically paired with a call to *taqwā:* "Fear (*ʾittaqū*) God and obey me."[37] The fact that the display of *taqwā* and obedience are paired, yet distinct suggests that obedience to a messenger is connected to lateral religious

---

are the ones who break pledges. Do they seek anything other than submission (*ʾaslama*) to God? Everyone in the heavens and earth submits to Him, willingly or unwillingly; they will all be returned to Him. Say [Muhammad], 'We believe (*āmannā*) in God and in what has been sent down to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes. We believe (*āmannā*) in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of the [prophets]. It is to Him that we devote ourselves (*muslimūn*).' If anyone seeks a religion other than complete devotion to God (*islām*), it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter."

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّيْنَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُم مِّن كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَى ذَلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُواْ أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُواْ وَأَنَاْ مَعَكُم مِّنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ فَمَن تَوَلَّى بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَن فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لاَ نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الإِسْلاَمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

[36] Qurʾān 4:64 (excerpt): "All the messengers We sent were meant to be obeyed …"

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلاَّ لِيُطَاعَ …

[37] For example, see Qurʾān 26:106-163.

particularities. This is supported by the fact that many Qurʾānic exhortations to obey Muḥammad are associated with descriptions of particular practices and laws, including those related to inheritance, fighting, usury, gambling and intoxicants.[38] Therefore, in the Qurʾān, all people are called to obey a messenger, but they are not all called to obey the same messenger.

Returning to the notions of believing and supporting, these two responses define what it means to not distinguish between messengers and revelation. To not distinguish means to believe in and recognize the truth of another revelation because it confirms the universal message of *taqwā*. The concept of support goes a step beyond mere recognition and requires that those who believe in God's revelations aid and assist each other. This is evident in the general descriptions of those who manifest *īmān*—irrespective of lateral particularities—as supporters and protectors of one another.[39] It is also vividly illustrated in Qurʾān 22:39-41, which authorizes fighting in order to protect the various houses within which God is worshiped.[40] Those who worship in and protect these houses are described as those who help (*N-Ṣ-R*) God's cause, those who establish prayer, pay alms, command the right and forbid the wrong, that is, the *muttaqūn*.

[38] For example, see Qurʾān 3:130, 4:13, 4:80-81, 5:92, 8:1.

[39] Qurʾān 9:71: "The believers, both men and women (*muʾminūn* and *muʾmināt*), support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people: God is almighty and wise."
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاء بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُوْلَـئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللّهُ إِنَّ اللّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

[40] Qurʾān 22:39-41: "Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged—God has the power to help them—those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help (*yanṣuranna*) those who help (*yanṣuru*) His cause—God is strong and mighty—those who, when We establish them in the land, keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, command what is right, and forbid what is wrong: God controls the outcome of all events."
أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِن دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَن يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ لَّهُدِّمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ الَّذِينَ إِن مَّكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ

5. Purpose of Lateral Religious Difference

The final topic that I will consider is the purpose of lateral religious difference. Qurʾānic *āyāt* that affirm the divinely-intended status of lateral religious particularities describe the appropriate response to those particularities as racing or vying (*ʾistabiqū*) with one another in pursuit of that which is good (*khayrāt*).[41] While the nature of this good can appear at first to be rather amorphous, it is important to recognize the connection between *khayrāt* and *taqwā*. Those who manifest *taqwā* are those who race after the *khayrāt*.[42] Therefore, *khayrāt* refers not simply to any good, but rather to the good as specifically defined through *taqwā*. It is the good that is manifest in belief, prayer, almsgiving, social interactions, and the prioritization of the vertical relationship with God over horizontal human relationships. Moreover, this is a good that must be pursued actively, constantly, and socially.

The question that arises, however, is what is the relationship of lateral religious difference to this commanded pursuit of *khayrāt*, to the striving for *taqwā*? Is it just an obstacle to be overlooked or ignored? Or does it have another purpose? I have already argued that revelation is both responsive to and productive of lateral difference, and that it is through lateral difference that the purpose of revelation—communicating the message of and fostering

---

[41] Qurʾān 2:148: "Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race (*ʾistabiqū*) to do good deeds (*khayrāt*) and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything"
وَلِكُلٍّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيهَا فَاسْتَبِقُواْ الْخَيْرَاتِ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُواْ يَأْتِ بِكُمُ اللّهُ جَمِيعًا إِنَّ اللّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
Qurʾān 5:48: "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming (*muṣaddiq*) the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community (*umma waḥida*), but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race (*ʾistabiqū*) to do good (*khayrāt*): you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about."
وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ وَلاَ تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ
[42] Qurʾān 23:57-61: "Those who stand in awe of their Lord, who believe in His messages, who do not ascribe partners to Him, who always give with hearts that tremble at the thought that they must return to Him, are the ones who race toward good things (*khayrāt*), and they will be the first to get them (*sābiqūn*)."
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ هُم مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِم مُّشْفِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُم بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُم بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوا وَّقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجِلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ رَاجِعُونَ أُوْلَئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ

the expression *taqwā*—is achieved. In other words, revelation is sent to particular *umam* and is responsive to the particular contexts. This is confirmed by the fact that revelation is delivered by a messenger from among the nation that is to receive revelation, as well as the fact that revelation is delivered in the people's own language.[43] It seems logical, therefore, to assume that another facet of the contextual responsiveness of God's message would be to tailor specific rites and practices that would facilitate the manifestation of *taqwā* in particular contexts.

However, contextual purpose is a slippery slope. If lateral religious difference is *only* a matter of contextual responsiveness, then what does that entail for those who follow the lateral religious particularities of revelations that came to geographically and temporally distant contexts? This is no small question. According to the Islamic tradition and the view that revelation has ceased, this is the situation in which all of humanity finds itself today. Every person who adheres to a particular religious tradition follows lateral religious particularities that were introduced in other contexts. Moreover, despite some attempts to claim the contrary, every religious tradition undergoes change in terms of rites and practices. Muslim communities today do not follow every single practice of Muḥammad. Some practices have been modified deliberately, some have been discontinued, and others have been adapted to suit new contexts. Additionally, there exists great diversity even within religious traditions. Lateral religious communities are neither static nor homogeneous. The questions of change and diversity within lateral religious communities—as well as interconnections between them— are worthy of extensive consideration, which is beyond the scope of this initial effort.

[43] Qurʾān 14:4: "We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them. But still God leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides whoever He will: He is the Almighty, the All Wise."

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلاَّ بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللّهُ مَن يَشَاء وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

However, it is important to note that the issue of change can also raise the question of corruption. I will make only two points in this regard. First, no religious community, including the Muslim community, is exempt from corruption. Even if the Qurʾān has divine protection for its textual integrity, this does not prevent its message from being interpreted and enacted in ways inconsistent with *taqwā*. In fact, reflecting back to the historical Islamic discourse on *taḥrif*, one of the more common definitions of *taḥrif* was corruption in terms of interpretation. Second, corruption is not synonymous with change. There is no inherent value in blind imitation. In fact, as seen in Chapter Eight, there can be great consequences associated with blind imitation, especially when it leads to or perpetuates injustice or oppression. Corruption, therefore, should be understood as that which impedes the manifestation of *taqwā*. Based on these brief observations, it seems that the purpose of lateral religious difference must transcend contextual responsiveness.

In this regard, it is helpful to reflect back to the depiction of another form of lateral difference, that is, lateral difference introduced through creation. This lateral difference was not responsive to context, but was designed in order to create a situation of relational engagement that would provoke ongoing reflection on the status of the 'other,' the 'self,' and God. I propose that in addition to contextual responsiveness, lateral religious difference is similarly designed to provoke ongoing reflection. It is intricately designed in its tensive and simultaneous demands for both obedience and non-distinction to perpetually challenge individuals, to continually raise questions about boundaries, difference and sameness. In other words, it is designed to maintain both proximity and otherness. The combination of lateral and hierarchical religious difference produces the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other. However, this 'other' is not simply a byproduct of the convergence of lateral and hierarchical

religious difference. This 'other' is the means by which God sustains God's challenge to humanity. The other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other becomes an *āya* of God, something that when reflectively engaged facilitates the singular human purpose, worship of God and manifestation of *taqwā*.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have aimed to explore the Qurʾānic depiction of the religious 'other.' This exploration has been premised upon the notion that existing interpretations of the religious 'other' display shortcomings that result from a specific underlying conception of difference. As a result, I have aimed not only to offer another interpretation of the discourse, but also to identify an alternative conception of difference and an alternative method of interpretation appropriate to that conception.

The impact of rethinking difference in this manner, however, is not only confined to the depiction of the religious 'other.' It also has implications for how we understand the Qurʾān itself. If the tension between lateral and hierarchical difference cannot be dissipated, and the dynamism and complexity of hierarchical difference cannot be reduced or confined, then it is impossible to present the Qurʾān as being primary concerned with classifying and unambiguously distinguishing between religious groups. The Qurʾān cannot be envisioned as a taxonomy of difference. Nor can it be conceived of as a verdict on difference or a yardstick by which humans may definitively judge each other on the basis of difference. Such judgment is the province of God alone on the Day of Resurrection.[44] Rather, the Qurʾān must be conceived

[44] Qurʾān 5:48: "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that

of as an exhortation, a challenge to humanity, a challenge to believe, act, and relate in certain ways. As the Qurʾān labels itself, it is guidance, and provocative guidance at that. It is guidance that challenges clear boundaries, challenges complacency, and challenges blind adherence. As with the other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other, this challenge is sustained through irreducible complexities and tensions. These complexities and tensions, however, are not barriers or deficiencies. Rather, they are the precise manner by which the Qurʾān, as God's Word, continues to speak. If complexity is reduced and dynamism contained, then the revelation assumes one meaning and desists from communicating. The divine and universal nature of this revelation is bound to its ability to continuously engage, speak, and challenge.

By embracing this inherent Qurʾānic complexity and dynamism, I have hoped to present an interpretation of religious difference that raises new questions and leads to other explorations. In particular, this study, which has focused on the Qurʾān, naturally impels the exploration of other Islamic sources (including *aḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and juridical writings) in light of the conception of religious difference presented herein. Moreover, as already indicated, the topics of lateral religious difference, change, and corruption also deserve much more extensive analysis. Above all, it is my hope that this study will not only encourage vigorous debate and discussion, but also the formulation of other novel conceptions and methodologies. If the Qurʾān, as God's Word, is never exhausted, then additional conceptions and methods have the

---

which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about."

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلاَ تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَـكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

Qurʾān 22:67-69: "We have appointed acts of devotion for every community to observe, so do not let them argue with you [Prophet] about this matter. Call them to your Lord—you are on the right path—and if they argue with you, say, 'God is well aware of what you are doing.' On the Day of Resurrection, God will judge between you regarding your differences."

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعُنَّكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَادْعُ إِلَى رَبِّكَ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَى هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيمٍ وَإِن جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

potential to unfurl other aspects of the Qurʾānic discourse, that is, other aspects of the Qurʾānic guidance and challenge.

Bibliography

Āasī, Ghulām Ḥaider. *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Ḥazm's* Kitāb al-faṣl fī al-milal wa-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986.

Abugideiri, Hibba. "*The Renewed Woman of American Islam: Shifting Lenses Toward 'Gender Jihad?'*." *The Muslim World* 91 (Spring 2001): 1-18.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, edited by Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague. Boston: Beacon, 2002.

Adang, Camilla. "Belief and Unbelief."" In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 1, 218. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. "Hypocrites and Hypocrisy." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 468. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Afsaruddin, Asma. "Celebrating Pluralism and Dialogue: Qurʾanic Perspectives." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 3 (2007): 389-406.

Afshar, Haleh. "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies." In *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, edited by Mai Yamani, 197-216. Reading, NY: Ithaca, 1996.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University, 1996.

Alī, ʿAbdullah Yusuf. *The Meaning of the Holy Qurʾan*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2004.

Arkoun, Mohammed. "Islam." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 565. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Arnaldez, R. "Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 3, 790. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. "K̲halḳ." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 4, 980. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993.

Asani, Ali S. "'So That You May Know One Another': A Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, *Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities* (July 2003): 40-51.

Aslan, Adnan. *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Kent: Japan Society Publications, 1994.

Ateş, A. "Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyi'l-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭāʾī, known as al-S̲hayk̲ha̲ al-Akbar." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 3, 707. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Aydin, Mahmut. "A Muslim Pluralist: Jalaluddin Rumi." In *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, edited by Paul Knitter, 220-236. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005.

———. “Religious Pluralism: A Challenge for Muslims—A Theological Evaluation.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2001): 330-352.

Ayoub, Mahmoud. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, edited by Irfan A. Omar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007.

———. “Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qurʾan and Contemporary Exegetical Tradition.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 2 (1997): 145-164.

———. “The Qurʾan and Religious Pluralism.” In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, edited by Roger Boase, 273-281. Surrey: Ashgate, 2005.

Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qurʾānic Usage*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Badran, Margot. “Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond.” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 6-28.

———. *Feminism Beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam.* New Delhi: Global Media, 2007.

———. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib. *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, edited by Richard J. McCarthy, S.J. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957.

Barazangi, Nimat Hafez. *Woman’s Identity and the Qurʾan: A New Reading*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004.

Barlas, Asma. “Amina Wadud’s Hermeneutics of the Qurʾan: Women rereading Sacred Texts.” In *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur’an*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki, 97-124. London: Oxford University, 2006.

———. *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*. Austin: University of Texas, 2002.

———. “Four Stages of Denial, or, My On-again, Off-again Affair with Feminism: Response to Margot Badran.” Paper presented at Ithaca College, October 2006.

———. “Globalizing Equality: Muslim Women, Theology, and Feminism.” In *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global* Era, edited by Fereshteh Nouraie-Simone, 91-110. New York: The Feminist Press at the City of New York, 2005.

———. “Hearing the Word, as a Muslim: Thirteen Passages of the Qurʾān and Religious Difference.” Paper presented at Cornell University Vespers, November 2007.

———. “‘Holding Fast by the Best in the Precepts’ – The Qurʾan and Method.” In *New Directions in Islamic Thought*, edited by Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen and Christian Moe, 17-22. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009.

———. “Reviving Islamic Universalism: East/s, West/s, and Coexistence.” Paper presented at the Conference on Contemporary Islamic Synthesis, Alexandria, Egypt, October 2003.

———. “Women’s Readings of the Qurʾān.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 255-271. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006.

Bearman, P., Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Beck, Ulrich. *What is Globalization?*, translated by Patrick Camiller. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

Berg, Herbert. "Polysemy in the Qurʾān." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 4, 155. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Björkman, W. "Kāfir." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 4, 407. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Boase, Roger, ed. *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2005.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania, 2004.

Brockett, A. "al-Munāfiḳūn." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 7, 561. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Brunner, Emile. "Revelation and Religion." In *Christianity and Other Religions*, edited by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, 113-132. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.

Bullock, Katherine. *Rethinking Muslim Women and The Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*. Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002.

Calder, Norman, J. A. Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, ed. *Classical Islam: a Sourcebook of Religious Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Chittick, William C. *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*. Albany: State University of New York, 1994.

———. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York, 1989.

———. *The Sufi Path of Love: the Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

cooke, miriam. "Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies." In *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, edited by Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, 142-160. New York: Routledge, 2002.

———. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Cornell, Vincent. "Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: The Relationship between Faith and Practice in Islam." In *The Oxford History of Islam,* edited by John L. Esposito, 63-105. New York: Oxford University, 1999.

Cuypers, Michel. *The Banquet. A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*. Miami: Convivium, 2009.

Davies, Merryl Wyn. *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*. London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988.

de Blois, François. "Sabians." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 4, 511. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Dean, Thomas, ed. *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*. New York: State University of New York, 1995.

Denny, Frederick Mathewson. "Community and Society in the Qurʾān." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 1, 367. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. "The Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qurʾān." *History of Religions* 15, no. 1 (Aug. 1975): 34-70.

———. "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qurʾān." *Numen* 24, no. 1 (Apr. 1977): 26-59.

Donner, Fred M. "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community." *al-Abhāth* 50-51 (2002-2003): 9-53.

———. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010.

Egnell, Helene. "Dialogue for Life: Feminist Approaches to Interfaith Dialogue." In *Theology and the Religions: a Dialogue*, edited by Viggo Mortenson, 249-256. Cambridge: Eerdsmans Publishing, 2003.

Engineer, Asghar Ali. *A Rational Approach to Islam*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2001.

———. "Islam and Pluralism." In *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, edited by Paul Knitter, 211-219. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005.

———. *Islam in Contemporary World*. New Delhi: New Dawn, 2007.

———. "Islam, Women, and Gender Justice." In *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, edited by John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, 109-128. New York: State University of New York, 2001.

———. *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2005.

Esack, Farid. "Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia." In *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, edited by John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, 187-210. New York: State University of New York, 2001.

———. "Muslims Engaging the Other and the *Humanum*." In *Proselytization and Communal Self-Determination in Africa*, edited by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naʾim, 51-76. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.

———. *Qurʾān, Liberation and Pluralism*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997.

———. "Religio-Cultural Diversity: For What and with Whom? Muslim Reflections from a Postapartheid South Africa in the Throes of Globalization." In *Cultural Diversity and Islam*, edited by Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk, 165-185. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003.

Fadel, Muhammad. "No Salvation Outside Islam": Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism." In *Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, edited by Mohammad Hassan Khalil (forthcoming).

al-Fārūqī, Ismāʿīl Rājī. "The Essence of Religious Experience in Islam." *Numen* 20, no. 3 (1973): 186-201.

———. “History of Religions: Its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim-Christian Dialogue.” *Numen* 12, no. 1 (1965): 35-65.

———. *Islam and Other Faiths*. Leicester, UK and Herndon, VA: The Islamic Foundation and International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998.

———. *al Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992.

al-Faruqi, Maysam. “Women’s Self-Identity in the Qurʾan and Islamic Law.” In *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*, ed. Gisela Webb, 72-101. Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2000.

Friedmann, Yohanan. *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University 2003.

Frolov, Dmitry V. “Freedom and Predestination.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 267. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Gardet, L. “al-Ḳaḍā; Wa 'l-ḳadar.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 4, 365. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. “Īmān.”" In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 3, 1170. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Gaudel, Jean-Marie, ed. *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*. Collection “Studi arabo-islamici del PISAI”, 15. Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2000.

al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa*, edited by Sulaymān Dunyā. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīya, 1961.

Gillis, Chester. *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology*. Louvain: Peeters, Eerdmans, 1998.

Gimaret, D. “SHirk.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 9, 484. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Gottschalk, H.L. “Abū ʿUbayd al-Ḳāsim b. Sallām (the *nisba* varies between al-Baghdādī, al-Khurāsāni and al-Anṣārī).” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 1, 157. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Griffith, Sidney H. “Christians and Christianity.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 1, 307. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Griffiths, Paul, ed. *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

Gross, Rita. “Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology,* edited by Susan Parsons, 60-78. New York: Cambridge University, 2002.

——— and respondents. “Roundtable Discussion: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 73-131.

———. “Steps Toward Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology.” In *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 234-247. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

———. “The Study of Religion as Religious Experience.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 11 (1991): 254-258.

———. “Where Have We Been? Where Do We Need to Go?: Women’s Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology.” In *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Ursula King and Tina Beattie, 17-27. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Ḥaddād, Wadīʿ Z. “A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian’s Refutation of the Basic Doctrines of Christianity: Al-Bāqillānī (d. A.D. 1013).” In *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadīʿ Zaydān Ḥaddād, 83-94. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and Wadīʿ Zaydān Ḥaddād, ed. *Christian-Muslim Encounters*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995.

——— and John L. Esposito, ed. *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2001.

———, Jane I. Smith and Kathleen M. Moore, ed. *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2006.

Hammer, Juliane. “Identity, Authority, and Activism: American Muslim Women Approach the Qurʾān.” *The Muslim World* 98 (Oct. 2008): 443-464.

Hassan, Riffat. “Feminism in Islam.” In *Feminism and World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, 248-278. Albany: State University of New York, 1999.

———. “Feminist Theology: The Challenges for Muslim Women.” In *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, edited by Haideh Moghissi, 195-208. London: Routledge, 2005.

———. “Human Rights in the Qurʾanic Perspective.” In *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*, edited by Gisela Webb, 241-248. Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2000.

———. “Islam.” In *Her Voice, Her Faith: Women Speak on World Religions,* edited by Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, 215-242. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003.

———. “‘*Jihād Fī Sabīl Allah*’: A Muslim Woman’s Faith Journey from Struggle to Struggle to Struggle,” and “The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition.” In *Women’s and Men’s Liberation: Testimonies of Spirit*, edited by Leonard Grob, Riffat Hassan, and Haim Gordon, 11-30, 65-82. New York: Greenwood, 1991.

———. “Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam.” In *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, edited by Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, 39-64. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.

———. “The Qurʾanic Perspective on Religious Pluralism.” In *Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburger, 91-101. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009.

———. “Women’s Rights in Islam: Normative Teachings Versus Practice.” In *Islam and Human Rights: Advancing a U.S.-Muslim* Dialogue, edited by Shireen T. Hunter and Huma Malik, 43-66. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005.

Hawting, Gerald R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999.

———. “Idolatry and Idolaters.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 475. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Heim, S. Mark. *The Depth of Riches: a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.

———. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Henzell-Thomas, Jeremy. “The Challenge of Pluralism and the Middle Way of Islam.” In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, edited by Roger Boase, 267-272. Surrey: Ashgate, 2005.

al-Hibri, Azizah. “Hagar on My Mind.” In *Philosophy, Feminism, and Faith*, edited by Ruth E. Groenhaut and Marya Bower, 198-212. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2003.

Hick, John. *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

——— and Brian Hebblethwaite, ed. *Christianity and Other Religions*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.

———. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2004.

——— and Paul F. Knitter, ed. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987.

———. “Religious Pluralism and Islam.” Paper presented at Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, Iran, February 2005.

Hidayatullah, Aysha. “Inspiration and Struggle: Muslim Feminist Theology and the Work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25, no.1 (2009): 162-170.

———. “Women Trustees of Allah: Methods, Limits, and Possibilities of ‘Feminist Theology’ in Islam.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009.

Hill Fletcher, Jeannine. “Christology between Identity and Difference: On Behalf of a World in Need.” In *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, edited by Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley, 79-96. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.

———. “Feminisms: Syncretism, Symbiosis, and Synergetic Dance.” In *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, edited by Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges, 136-154. London: SCM, 2008.

———. “Karl Rahner’s Principles of Ecumenism and Contemporary Religious Pluralism.” In *Theology and the Social Sciences*, The Annual Publication of the College Theological Society, vol. 46, edited by Michael Horace Barnes, 181-194. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

———. *Monopoly On Salvation?: A Feminist Approach To Religious Pluralism*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

———. “Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization: the Making of Modern Religious Identity.” *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (June 2008): 395-411.

———. “Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 5-24.

Hofmann, Murad Wilfried. “Religious Pluralism and Islam in a Polarised World.” In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, edited by Roger Boase, 235-245. Surrey: Ashgate, 2005.

Hoyland, Robert G. *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society,* The Formation of the Classical Islamic World, vol. 18. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Huda, Qamar-ul. “Knowledge of Allah and the Islamic View of Other Religions.” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 278-305.

Ibn al-ʿArabī. *al-Fūtūhat al-Makkiyya*. Cairo, 1911.

Ibn Ḥazm, ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-faṣl fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal,* 5 vols. Jeddah: ʾUqaẓ, 1982.

Ibn al-Jawzi, ʾAbd al-Raḥman. *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmīya, 1992.

———. “On the Edicts of the Caliph al-Qādir.” In *Classical Islam: a Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, ed. Norman Calder, J. A. Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, 159-162. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Ibn Kathīr, Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1987.

Ibn Sallām, Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim. “Chapter on the Characteristics of Faith with Regards to Its Perfection and Its Stages.” In *Classical Islam: a Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, ed. Norman Calder, J. A. Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, 135-142. New York: Routledge, 2003.

———. *Kitāb al-īmān wa-maʿālimihi, wa-sunanihi, wa-istikmālihi, wa- darajātihi*. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983.

Ibn Taymiyya, Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm. *al-Īmān*. Cairo: Maktabat Anas Ibn Mālik, 1980.

———. *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*. Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Nīl, 1905.

———. Kitāb al-īmān*: Book of Faith*, edited and translated by Salman Hassan Al-Ani and Shadia Ahmad Tel. Bloomington, IN: Iman Publishing House, 1999.

——— *Majmūʿ fatāwā shaykh al-islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*. Cairo: al-Shurafā’ li-al-Tibāʿah wa Taṣwīr al-Mustanadāt, 1979.

———. *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's* al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ, edited and translated by Thomas F. Michel. Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1999.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām*. Tokyo: Keio University, 1965. Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Books Trust, 2006.

———. *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qurʾan*. Montreal: McGill University, 2002. Reprint Selangor, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2004. Originally published as *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*. Tokyo: Keio University Institute of Philological Studies, 1959.

———. *God and Man in the Qurʾan: Semantics of the Qurʾanic Weltanschauung*. Tokyo: Keio University, 1964. Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Books Trust, 2008.

al-Jabbār, ʿAbd. *Critique of Christian Origins: a Parallel English-Arabic Text*, edited and translated by Gabriel Said Reynolds and Khalil Samir. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010.

Jackson, Sherman A. *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī's* Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa. Oxford: Oxford University, 2002.

al-Jamil, Tariq. "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shiʿi Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam." In *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, edited by Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, 229-246. Karachi: Oxford University, 2010.

Johnson, Elizabeth. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

Jones, J. Lynn. *Believing as Ourselves*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2002.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.

Kassis, Hanna E. *A Concordance of the Qurʾān*. Berkeley: University of California, 1983.

Khalil, Mohammad Hassan. "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others'." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007.

Kinberg, Leah. "Piety." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 4, 90. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

King, Ursula. "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions." In *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, edited by John D'Arcy May, 40-58. Herndon, VA: Cassell/Wellington House, 1998.

——— and Tina Beattie, ed. *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002, 2008.

———. *No Other Name?: A Christian Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985, 2003.

———. "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, edited by John Hick and Paul Knitter, 178-200. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987.

Kwok, Pui-lan. "Beyond Pluralism." In *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 186-208. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

———. "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology,* edited by Susan Parsons, 23-39. New York: Cambridge University, 2002.

———. *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim, 2000.

Legenhausen, Muhammad. "Islam and Religious Pluralism." *al-Tawhid: A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Thought and Culture* 14 (1997): 115-54.

———. *Islam and Religious Pluralism*. London: Al Hoda Publishing, 1999.

———. "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism." In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, edited by Roger Boase, 51-73. Surrey: Ashgate, 2005.

Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.

Laoust, H. "Ibn Taymiyya, Taḳī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 3, 951. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Lumbard, Joseph. "Qurʾānic Inclusivism in an Age of Globalization." In *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar, 151-162. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008.

Madigan, Daniel A. "Book." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 1, 242. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University, 2001.

———. "Revelation and Inspiration." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 4, 437. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Marshall, Dave. *God, Muhammad, and the Unbelievers: A Qurʾanic Study*. Surrey: Curzon, 1999.

Mattson, Ingrid. *The Story of the Qurʾan: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006.

———, ed. *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. *Qurʾanic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991.

———. "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 46-62. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.

———. "Reading the Qurʾan with Fidelity and Freedom." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (Sept. 2005): 615-635.

McCarthy, Kate. "Women's Experience as a Hermeneutical Key to a Christian Theology of Religions." *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 6, no. 2 (1996): 163-173.

McCarthy, R.J. "al-Bāḳillānī (i.e. the greengrocer), the ḳāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad b. Dja'far b. al-Ḳāsim." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 1, 958. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

McGarvey, Kathleen. *Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue: The Case of Northern Nigeria*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.

Memon, Muhammad Umar, ed. and trans. *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle Against Popular Religion with an Annotated Translation of His* Kitāb iqtiḍā' aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.

Min, Anselm Kyongsuk. "Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 587-604.

Mir, Mustansir. "Polytheism and Atheism." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 4, 158. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Moghadam, Valentine M. "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1135-1171.

Moghissi, Haideh. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*. London: Zed Books, 1999.

———, ed. *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology.* Volume One: Images and Realities. London: Routledge, 2005.

Mojab, Shahrzad. "Islamic Feminism: Alternative or Contradiction?" *Fireweed*, no. 47 (Winter 1995): 18-25.

———. "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'." *Feminist Review* 69 (Winter 2001): 124-146.

Mortenson, Viggo, ed. *Theology and the Religions: a Dialogue*. Cambridge: Eerdsmans Publishing, 2003.

Murata, Sachiko and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. New York: Paragon House, 1994.

Mutahhari, Shahid Ayatullah Murtadha. *Islam and Religious Pluralism*. Kitchener, Ontario: Islamic Publishing House, 2004.

al Najjar, 'Abd al Majīd. *The Vicegerency of Man: Between Revelation and Reason: A Critique of the Dialectic of the Text, Reason, and Reality*. Herndon, VA: The international Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "The Creation of the World and of Human Beings," "Religion and Religions," "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," and "Islam's Attitude Towards Other Religions in History." In *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar, 47-58, 59-81, 83-120, 121-134. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008.

———. "Comments on a Few Theological Issues in the Islamic-Christian Dialogue." In *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadī' Zaydān Ḥaddād, 457-465. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995.

———. "The Islamic View of Christianity." In *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*, edited by Paul J. Griffiths, 126-134. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

al-Nawawī, Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf Muḥyī al-Dīn. "Ḥadīth Two." In *Classical Islam: a Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, edited by Norman Calder, J. A. Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, 143-146. New York: Routledge, 2003.

———. *Une herméneutique de la tradition islamique : le commentaire des* Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīya *de Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (m. 676/1277)*, edited by Louis Pouzet, S.J. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1982.

———. *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn al-Nawawīya wa-sharḥu*. Manshīyat al-bakrā, Egypt: Dār ḥarāʾ lil-kitāb, 1987.

———. *Al-Nawawi's Forty Ḥadīth (*Matn al-arbaʿīn al-Nabawiyya*)*, edited and translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.

Ogden, Schubert M. "Problems in the Case for a Pluralistic Theology of Religions." *The Journal of Religion* 68, no. 4 (Oct. 1988): 493-507.

Oppenheim, Michael. "Feminism, Jewish Philosophy, and Religious Pluralism." *Modern Judaism* 16, no. 2 (May 1996): 147-160.

Osman, Mohamed Fathi. *The Children of Adam: An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism*. Washington, DC: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, 1996.

Panikkar, Raimon. *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1999.

Parsons, Susan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. New York: Cambridge University, 2002.

Partin, Harry B. "Semantics of the Qurʾān: A Consideration of Izutsu's Studies." *History of Religions* 9, no. 4 (May 1970): 358-362.

Peters, Francis. "*Alius* or *Alter*: The Qurʾānic Definition of Christians and Christianity." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (1997): 165-76.

———. *A Reader on Classical Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1994.

Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Pouzet, Louis, ed. *Une herméneutique de la tradition islamique : le commentaire des* Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīya *de Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (m. 676/1277)* Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1982.

Pulcini, Theodore. *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures,* American Academy of Religion, The Religions Series, no. 2. Atlanta: Scholars, 1998.

Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982.

———. *Islamic Methodology in History*. Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965.

———. "A Muslim Response: Christian Particularity and the Faith of Islam." In *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, edited by Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, 69-82. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978.

———. “The People of the Book and the Diversity of ‘Religions’.” In *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*, edited by Paul J. Griffiths, 102-110. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990

———. *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalisms*, edited by Ebrahim Moosa. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

Rapoport, Yossef and Shahab Ahmed, ed. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*. Karachi: Oxford University, 2010.

al-Rāzi, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar Ibn al-Ḥusayn. *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb al-mushtahar biʾl-tafsīr al-kabīr*. Istanbul: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿAmirah, 1891.

Reçber, Mehmet Sait. “Hick, the Real and *al-Ḥaqq*.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 1 (2005): 3-10.

Reynolds, Gabriel Said and Khalil Samir, ed. and trans. *Critique of Christian Origins: a Parallel English-Arabic Text*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010.

———. *A Muslim Theologian in a Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins,* Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 56. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Rippin, Andrew, ed. *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾan*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.

Ritter, H. and Bausani, A. “DJalālal-Dīn Rūmī b. Bahāʾ al-Dīn Sulṭān al-ʿulamāʾ Walad b. Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad Ḵhaṭībī.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 2, 393. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Rizvi, Sajjad H. “A Primordial *e pluribus unum*? Exegeses on Q. 2:213 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism.” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004): 21-42.

Roald, Anne Sofie. “Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic Sources: Muslim Feminist Theology in the Light of the Christian Tradition of Feminist Thought.” In *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations,* edited by Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, 17-44. Oxford: Berg, 1998.

———. *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Rubin, Uri. “Children of Israel.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 1, 303. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. “Ḥanīf.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 402. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. “The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology,* edited by Susan Parsons, 3-22. New York: Cambridge University, 2002.

———. “The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4, 75th Anniversary Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Dec. 1985): 703-713.

———. “Growing Pluralism, New Dialogue.” In *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women’s Religious Writing*, edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, 425-468. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

———. *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.

Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Discourses of Rūmī* (Fīhī mā Fīhī), translated by A. J. Arberry. London: John Murray, 1961.

———. *The Mathnawī of Jalāluʾuddīn Rūmī*, 8 vols., edited and translated by R. A Nicholson. London: Luzac, 1925-1940.

——— and William C. Chittick. *The Sufi Path of Love: the Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

Ruzgar, Mustapha. “Islam and Deep Religious Pluralism.” In *Deep Religious Pluralism*, edited by David Ray Griffin, 158-177. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Sachedina, Abdulaziz. *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2001.

———. “Islamic Theology of Christian-Muslim Relations.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 1 (1997): 27-38.

———. “The Qurʾan and Other Religions.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 291-309. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006.

Saeed, Abdullah. *Interpreting the Qurʾān: Towards a Contemporary Approach*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Safi, Omid, ed. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. Oxford: OneWorld, 2003.

Saleh, Walid A. “Ibn Taymiyyah and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of An Introduction to the Foundations of Qurʾānic Exegesis.” In *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, edited by Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, 123-162. Karachi: Oxford University, 2010.

Schacht, Joseph. “Review of The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Koran by Toshihiko Izutsu.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83, no. 3 (Aug.-Sept. 1963): 366-367.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon, 1984.

———. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon, 1992.

———. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

Shah-Kazemi, Reza. “Illumination and Non-Delimitation: Lessons for Inter and Intra Faith Dialogue.” In *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar, 163-178. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008.

———. *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qurʾan and Interfaith Dialogue*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006.

Shahidian, Hammed. "The Politics of the Veil: Reflections on Symbolism, Islam, and Feminism." *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present* 4, no. 2 (1997): 325-337.

Sharma, Arvind and Katherine K. Young, ed. *Feminism and World Religions*. Albany: State University of New York, 1999.

———. *Her Voice, Her Faith: Women Speak on World Religions*. Boulder: Westview, 2003.

Sirry, Munʾim. "'Compete with One Another in Good Works': Exegesis of Qurʾan Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 424-438.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Originally published by New York: Macmillan, 1962, 1963.

———. *Toward a World Theology*. London: Macmillian, 1981.

Smith, Jane. "Faith." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, 162. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. *A Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islām' as seen in a Sequence of Qurʾān Commentaries*. Montana: Scholars, University of Montana, 1975.

——— and Yvonne Haddad. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. Albany: State University of New York, 1981.

Sourdel, D. "al-Ḳādir Bi'llāh." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 4, 378. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Stern, S.M. "Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāḳ." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 1, 130. Leiden: Brill, 1960-2005.

Stowasser, Barbara. "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation." In *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, 30-44. New York: Oxford University, 1998.

———. *Women in the Qurʾan, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University, 1994.

al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āyāt al-Qurʾān*. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubra al-Amīrīyah, 1900-1911.

Taji-Farouki, Suha, ed. *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qurʾan*. London: Oxford University and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004.

Talbi, Mohamed. "Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien et Sensibilitités Religieuses" and "A Community of Communities." In *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*. Collection "Studi arabo-islamici del PISAI", 15, edited by Jean-Marie Gaudel, 113-117, 335-340. Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2000.

———. "Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien et Sensibilitités Religieuses." *Islamochristiana*, Rome 1 (1975): 11-25.

———. "Islam and Dialogue—Some Reflections on a Current Topic." In *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*, edited by Paul J. Griffiths, 82-101. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

Thomas, David. "ʿAbū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq and the History of Religions." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41 (1996): 275-290.

———, ed. and trans. *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū ʿĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Trinity"*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 45. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992.

———. "Apologetic and Polemic in the *Letter from Cyprus* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*." In *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, edited by Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, 247-265. Karachi: Oxford University, 2010.

———. *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

———, ed. and trans. *Early Muslim Polemic Against Christianity: Abū ʿĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Incarnation"*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 59. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002.

———. "al-Ṭabarī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 10, 17. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Tracy, David. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Umar, Muhammad Suheyl, ed. *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age.* Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008.

Van Nieuwkerk, Karin, ed. *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*. Austin: University of Texas, 2006.

Veccia Vaglieri, L. "ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 1, 40. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Waardenburg, Jacques. "Muslim Studies of Other Religions: The Medieval Period." In *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society,* The Formation of the Classical Islamic World, vol. 18, edited by Robert G. Hoyland, 211-239. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Wadud, Amina. "Alternative Qurʾanic Interpretation and the Status of Muslim Women." In *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*, ed. Gisela Webb, 3-21. Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2000.

———. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

———. *Qurʾan and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Texts from a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford University, 1999.

———. "Response: Roundtable Discussion, Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 90-100.

———. "Towards a Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender." *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1, (1995-1996): 37-50.

Waldman, Marilyn Robinson. "The Development of the Concept of *Kufr* in the Qurʾān." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1968): 442-455.

al-Warrāq, Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn. *Kitāb al-radd ʻalā l-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā*, edited and translated by David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū ʻĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Trinity"*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 45. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992; *Idem*, *Early Muslim Polemic Against Christianity: Abū ʻĪsá al-Warrāq's "Against the Incarnation",* University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 59. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002.

Watt, W. Montgomery. "al-G̲H̲azālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 2, 1038. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. "Ḥanīf." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 3, 165. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Webb, Gisela, ed. *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2000.

Wensinck, A.J. "Muslim." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 7, 688. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Winter, Tim. "The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths." *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9, no. 2 (1999): 133-55.

Yamani, Mai, ed. *Feminism & Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives.* New York: New York University, 1996.

Young, Iris Marion. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2000.

———. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1997.

———. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1990.